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Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 6

www.saipantribune.com | TUESDAY JANUARY 9, 2024 | www.facebook.com/saipantribune

Over $25K raised in 7th IPI auction. PAGE 2
Rabauliman is appointed DCCA secretary. PAGE 3

$1

Influx of tourists expected next month

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Tourist go through security at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport before they board their flights.

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The CNMI can expect an influx of visitors next month, with the number of flights from Korea increasing and more cruise ships passing by Saipan for a port call.

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'Authority to issue subpoenas is a critical check-and-balance on OAG'

» Manibusan says Public Defender propagated misinformation regarding AGID bill

Manibusan

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Attorney General Edward Manibusan has asserted that the authority to issue subpoenas serves as a critical check-and-balance on the Office of the Attorney General.

In a letter to Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) on Friday, Manibusan said initiating a subpoena involves a request by their office and subsequent issuance by the clerk of court, lending judicial

See OAG on Page 4

Female victim in Finasisu homicide remains in ICU

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Days after finding her unresponsive and with massive blunt force injuries on her face, the female victim in the Finasisu homicide remains in critical condition at the Commonwealth Health Center, with police stationed outside her hospital room.

According to the latest update from the Department of Public Safety, the female victim in the Finasisu homicide remains medically unstable as of press time and is still in CHC's intensive care unit.

Aside from this, "there are no further updates in the case, as the investigation continues," said DPS spokesperson Fred Sato yesterday.

The attack that injured the woman also killed one man, who is presumed to be the

See FEMALE on Page 4

Macaranas returns as DOC deputy commissioner

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Although not completely out of retirement, former assistant police chief Anthony Iglecias Macaranas has returned to government service, this time as the new deputy commissioner for the Department of Corrections—a post he will serve on a pro bono basis.

Macaranas, who retired from the police force in 2022 after serving for 35 years, has returned from a brief hiatus and will now

See MACARANAS on Page 4

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Department of Corrections Commissioner Anthony Torres, left, and newly appointed deputy commissioner Anthony Macaranas pose for a photo after a press conference yesterday.

INSIDE

BUSINESS

Congressional leaders have reached an agreement on overall spending levels for the current fiscal year that could help avoid a partial government shutdown later this month.

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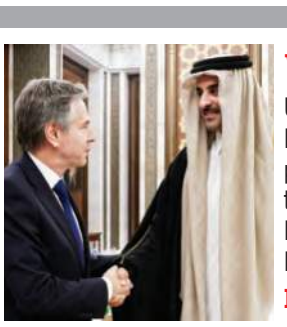

WORLD

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Sunday with Arab partners to press for their help in tamping down resurgent fears that Israel's three-month war against Hamas in Gaza could spread.

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LIFE & STYLE

Christopher Nolan's blockbuster biopic "Oppenheimer" dominated the 81st Golden Globes, winning five awards including best drama.

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SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.

Local

Over $25K raised in 7th IPI auction

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Clear Management Ltd.'s seventh auction to sell off some Imperial Pacific International (CNMI) LLC's gaming properties as part of a court-ordered receivership earned over $25,000, but not all lots for sale attracted bidders, so another auction will be held in February.

Pursuant to the receivership granted by the U.S. District Court for the NMI in favor of IPI creditor USA Fanter, Clear Management, through attorney Michael White, is now asking the district court to reimburse them for the costs incurred from the auction.

In addition, because bidders are only required to pay 15% of their bid to secure the item they wish to purchase, Clear Management is asking that the court allow them to collect the remaining 85% of the bids.

According to White's motion for order approving the report and account of the seventh auction, Clear Management as court-appointed receiver asks the court to authorize and direct the disbursement of $18,819 being held by the court to reimburse it for costs incurred from this auction.

Clear Management also asks the court to authorize it to collect the remaining 85% of the successful bids and to execute the appropriate bills of sale to deliver the items sold to the successful bidders.

According to a report in support of Clear Management's motion, Clear held the seventh auction last Dec. 1, 2023, covering a portion of IPI's gaming equipment. Specifically, 230 lots (or items) were offered during the auction.

Clear said acceptable bids were received for 34 lots but no bids were received on the remaining 196 lots.

"Clear Management will attempt to sell these lots at an eighth auction, which is scheduled for Feb. 23, subject to court approval," states the report.

Breaking down the successful bids received, Clear Management sold 12 lots to IPI worth $4,681; 11 lots to MP Holdings worth 13,700; and 11 lots to Gaming Supplies Ltd. worth $6,761.

The total value of the successful bids received was $25,142.

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Rabauliman is appointed DCCA secretary

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios appointed Francisco M. Rabauliman on Friday as secretary of the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, elevating him from his interim appointment to become the department's new chief.

Rabauliman has been serving as the DCCA secretary in a temporary capacity since August 2023 when then-DCCA chief Margaret Santos Sablan resigned.

Rabauliman's appointment requires the Senate's confirmation.

Palacios informed Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) that he and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang have complete confidence in Rabauliman's qualifications and capabilities to fulfill the responsibilities of running DCCA efficiently and excellently.

Rabauliman

The governor told Rabauliman that they are confident that he will be an asset to the CNMI.

When Rabauliman was appointed as acting DCCA secretary in August 2023, he immediately worked on getting the U.S. National Park Service to extend its deadline for the Historic Preservation Office to repair and renovate some old government buildings on Saipan. The deadline was part of a $6-million grant awarded to HPO three years ago.

Rabauliman is a member of the Commonwealth Economic Development Authority board of directors. He is a former administrator of the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality, and former chairman of the Northern Marianas College board.

Bench trial for Senate president's daughter reset

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
The CNMI Guma Hustisia or CNMI Judiciary in Susupe.

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Superior Court has rescheduled the bench trial of the daughter of Senate president Edith Deleon Guerrero's (D-Saipan), who is accused of assaulting a government lawyer.

Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph Camacho has rescheduled the bench trial for Nanami Deleon Guerrero Mafnas, who allegedly assaulted CNMI assistant attorney general Keisha Blaise in March 2023.

According to the scheduling order, Mafnas' trial, which was initially set for Jan. 16, has been rescheduled to March 13, at 9am.

Mafnas, who is the daughter of Deleon Guerrero and former Department of Public Safety commissioner Ray Mafnas and is represented by the Office of the Public Defender in this case, chose to proceed to trial instead of pleading guilty.

Mafnas, who is facing charges of assault and battery and disturbing the peace, faces a maximum imprisonment sentence of one year, a $1,000 fine, or both, for the assault charge.

The information filed in court states that Mafnas grabbed the victim by her braided hair, pulled her out of the vehicle, and hit her face and body on or about March 18, 2023, on Saipan.

The charge of disturbing the peace arose from the same incident. The court information states that Mafnas physically assaulted the victim, causing her to feel scared to leave home. Mafnas faces a maximum imprisonment sentence of six months and a $500 fine if found guilty.

The Superior Court issued an arrest warrant for Mafnas last April 2023 with bail set at $5,000.

Jourdon Brennan named to SNHU Dean's List

MANCHESTER, NH— Jourdon Brennan of Saipan has been named to Southern New Hampshire University's fall 2023 Dean's List. The fall terms run from September to December.

Full-time undergraduate students who have earned a minimum grade-point average of 3.500 to 3.699 for the reporting term are named to the Dean's List. Full-time status is achieved by earning 12 credits over each 16-week term or paired 8-week terms grouped in fall, winter/spring, and summer.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Southern New Hampshire University is a private, nonprofit institution with a 91-year history of educating traditional-aged students and working adults.

SNHU is a private, nonprofit institution with a 91-year history of educating traditional-aged students and working adults. Now serving more than 225,000 learners worldwide, SNHU offers approximately 200 accredited undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs, available online and on its 300-acre campus in Manchester, NH. ***(PR)***

3 from Saipan make it to SNHU's fall President's List

MANCHESTER, NH— Three students from Saipan have been named to Southern New Hampshire University's fall 2023 President's List. The fall terms run from September to December.

The students from Saipan are Judith Santos, Shanel Sablan, and Kina Sablan.

Full-time undergraduate students who have earned a minimum grade-point average of 3.700 and above for the reporting term are named to the President's List. Full-time status is achieved by earning 12 credits over each 16-week term or paired 8-week terms grouped in fall, winter/spring, and summer.

SNHU is a private, nonprofit institution with a 91-year history of educating traditional-aged students and working adults. Serving more than 225,000 learners worldwide, SNHU offers approximately 200 accredited undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs, available online and on its 300-acre campus in Manchester, NH. ***(PR)***

CNMI DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
CNMI GOVERNMENT

INVITATION TO BID
ITB NO.: ITB24-BECQ/DLNR-42400026-CIF ROTA

SUBMISSION DATE: JANUARY 30, 2024 TIME: 09:30 A.M.

"PURCHASE OF ONE (1) AGRICULTURAL TRACTOR FOR DLNR, ROTA"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS ITB CAN BE MADE TO THE BUREAU OF ENVIROMENTAL & COASTAL QUALITY BY JANUARY 19, 2024, TO MR. RICHARD V. SALAS VIA EMAIL AT rsalas@dcrm.gov.mp

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ RICHARD V. SALAS
ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, BECQ

/S/ BRIEN S. NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality
Division of Coastal Resources Management
P.O. Box 501304, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 664-8300; Fax: (670) 664-8315
www.dcrm.gov.mp

Eli D. Cabrera
Administrator

Richard V. Salas
Director, DCRM

PUBLIC NOTICE

From the
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
of the DIVISION OF COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

DATE: January 9, 2024

NOTICE: The Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ) - Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM) is currently reviewing the following federal consistency submission(s) for consistency with the CNMI's enforceable policies:

1) Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) consistency determination for the proposed replacement of the electrical line distribution system at Saipan International Airport. https://dcrm.gov.mp/wp-content/uploads/crm/CNMI-CZMA-FAA-GSN-ELD-Replacement-CD.pdf

Federal consistency is a provision of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) that requires federal actions that affect the CNMI coastal zone to be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the CNMI's federally approved Coastal Management Program (CMP).

For more information, or to submit comments, please contact the Division of Coastal Resources Management at fedcon@dcrm.gov.mp. Comments may be submitted within fifteen days of the publication of this notice. This public notice has been published for compliance with 15 CFR § 930.42.

COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY
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Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport
"Car Rental Concession"

Request for Proposals
for: CPA-RFP-001-24
CPA Concession No. CRS-2023-01

The Commonwealth Ports Authority ("CPA" or "Authority") is soliciting proposals for the award of one (1) concession granting the privilege to provide motor vehicle rental services to the traveling public (including the provision of insurance related to motor vehicles rented in the operation of such motor vehicle rental services) at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport ("Car Rental Concession"). The successful proposer will be expected to provide motor vehicle rental services in accordance with its concession and concession agreement at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport for a period of two years with an option upon entering into a concession agreement with the Authority.

The date of issuance of CPA-Concession No. CRS-2023-01 is **December 6, 2023**, and it can be obtained at the issuing office: CPA Administration Office, Saipan International Airport, P.O. Box 501055, Saipan, MP 96950, Second floor of Arrival terminal at the Saipan International Airport.

Proposals must be addressed to Commonwealth Ports Authority, Attn: Car Rental Concessions Evaluation Committee, CPA Administration Office, Saipan International Airport, P.O. Box 501055, Saipan, MP 96950; and submitted to and received by the CPA Administration Office (second floor of arrival terminal at the Saipan International Airport) **by or before 4:00 p.m. on January 9, 2024**, at which time the proposal period shall expire. Proposals must be accompanied with a non-refundable administrative fee of $100.00. Payment shall be made in cash, credit card, or cashier's check payable to the Commonwealth Ports Authority to defray the costs associated with handling and considering the proposal. Proposals are not required to include a prepaid minimum concession fee.

The Commonwealth Ports Authority reserves the right to cancel this RFP and to reject any and all proposals in accordance with its Concession Regulations (NMIAC Chapter 40-70).

/s/
LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

NMTech offers scholarships, pre-apprenticeship program

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

Today is the last day of registration as the Northern Marianas Technical Institute prepares to start classes on Jan. 16, with courses to be offered ranging from the core fundamentals of construction and automotive technology, to air conditioning and refrigeration; electrical and welding; culinary arts; and baking and pastry.

Ben Babauta, NMTech's Marketing and Outreach coordinator, assured yesterday they also offer in-house scholarships.

"We do have an in-house scholarship that can pay for 99% of the classes, and then we do have another scholarship in partnership with CNMI Department of Labor and [Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act]," he said.

That partnership is a pre-apprenticeship program, which is currently being advertised for NMTech's Core Construction program.

"So what you could do is check if you qualify with the CNMI Department of Labor, apply, and, after qualifying, you take the classes at NMTech and DOL will pay you $7.25 per hour for each hour you attend class, and they will also pay for your tuition….[At the end], you would do a three-month internship with a construction company on Saipan and they will pay you for the three-month internship to work for the company," Babauta said.

He described it as a "very great opportunity" and NMTech is launching it so people can explore the construction field and see which one they would like to specialize in, whether electrical, air-conditioning, welding, or carpentry.

"WIOA is our partner for the apprenticeship program, but they have two different programs… the pre-apprenticeship and the apprenticeship. The pre-apprenticeship program is for individuals who don't have a job and you're going to learn a new skill and then get a job. …They're going to pay for the class and they pay you for the three-month internship."

After their new student orientation on Jan. 11, courses will officially begin on Jan. 16. The available course are the following:

■ The Construction: Core Fundamentals course will begin on Jan. 16. from 5pm to 7:30pm, Monday to Thursday until March 26.

■ Electrical Level 1 courses will also begin on Jan. 16, Monday to Thursday, from 5pm to 7:30pm until it concludes on June 25.

■ HVAC Level one course classes will begin on Jan. 16, from 5pm to 7:30pm, Monday to Thursday, and will end on July 2. HVAC stands for heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning.

■ Automotive Engine Performance and Steering and Suspension courses will also begin on Jan. 16, with the steering and suspension classes happening from 9am to 11:30am, Monday to Thursday, until June 11. For the Automotive Engine Performance, classes are from 2:30 pm to 5pm, Monday to Thursday, and will conclude on Aug. 7.

■ Culinary Arts and Baking and Pastry classes will both begin on Jan. 22, and end May 21, with Culinary classes being held on Monday and Wednesday, from 3pm to 7pm, and Baking and Pastry classes from 3pm to 7pm, on Tuesday and Thursday.

■ NMTech also offers a Welding Level 1 course that begins on April 1 and concludes May 5.

Babauta noted that registration is open online, but he recommends going to their office in Puerto Rico, so students can also find out if they're eligible for the scholarship and apprenticeship program, from the DOL staff onsite at the school.

Further course details are available at nmtechcnmi.org/. You can also email admissions@nmtechcnmi.org or call (670) 235-684.

OAG

From page 1

weight to the process.

Manibusan's letter underscores the importance of House Bill 23-22 to combat crime, curb corruption, and safeguard the interests of Commonwealth citizens. Manibusan also wrote the letter to clarify what he described as "misinformation" propagated by the Office of the Public Defender regarding the bill.

Rep. Marissa Renee Flores (Ind-Saipan) introduced the bill last March to create an investigative division within the OAG, codify its investigative subpoena power, and improve the investigation of cases involving public corruption.

The House passed the legislation on May 10, 2023, and it was transmitted the following day to the Senate. The bill is now with the Senate Judiciary, Government and Law Committee chaired by Sen. Celina R. Babauta (D-Saipan).

Manibusan said House Bill 23-22 guarantees the right to legal representation for individuals who may be subjected to a subpoena.

He urged the Senate to bring the legislation to the floor for a vote. "Passing this significant legislation would signify unity with our community in combatting government corruption and other criminal activities within the Commonwealth," he said.

Manibusan said he firmly believes that, as the CNMI's attorney general, embedded within his office's constitutional obligation to prosecute violations of CNMI law is the authority to investigate and issue subpoenas to procure essential documents and witness testimonies.

By codifying these powers into law, they establish clear boundaries, crucial in maintaining an effective check-and-balance system within the government, he said.

As for the alleged misinformation by the OPD, Manibusan concedes that the Attorney General Investigative Division already exists and that Public Laws 18-13 and 18-14 clarify and recognize that AGID investigators are law enforcement officers. He said the proposed bill primarily aims to refine and articulate AGID's responsibilities.

"It does not duplicate government agencies or services," said Manibusan, adding that the AGID operates within the OAG, supporting their mandate to prosecute Commonwealth law violations.

Headed by a chief investigator and supported by additional investigators, the AGID aids in investigations conducted by the OAG, facilitating the prosecution of cases in court. Similar to practices in other states and territories, their investigative division functions independently, addressing reported corruption and criminal activities that fall beyond the tasks of other law enforcement agencies.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

INFLUX

From page 1

As the Lunar New Year approaches, Jeju Airlines is expected increase its number of flights from Korea to Saipan. It was learned that Jeju Air will launch 10 additional flights from Feb. 7 through Feb. 16.

The flight will be using a B737 aircraft with a 189-seat capacity per flight. That's over 1,800 possible visitors to Saipan next month.

Currently, Jeju Air provides two daily flights from Seoul, Korea to Saipan.

In a statement from Marianas Visitors Authority managing director Chris Concepcion, he said the announcement of additional flights from Korea is in response to the demand for travel to the CNMI, thanks to MVA's efforts to market the CNMI as a destination for Korean travelers.

"The MVA is very pleased with the announcement by Jeju Air of the launch of 10 additional flights from Seoul to Saipan during the Lunar New Year period. These flights will take place from Feb. 7 to 16, giving us an additional 1,890 seats during this high peak period. This is in addition to the twice daily flights Jeju currently operates on this route," he added.

Jeju Air is currently the largest air carrier operating between the Marianas and Korea.

Concepcion said the MVA has been working very closely with its headquarters in Seoul, along with key travel agencies, to promote the Marianas in Korea "and it's paying off."

"[Jeju Air] saw the demand and responded to it by adding flights, so we are grateful for their partnership and support of our tourism industry," said Concepcion.

Meanwhile, additional cruise ships have already confirmed they will be making port calls on Saipan next month and possibly in March. This is expected to bring yet another boost in the number of visitors coming to the CNMI, as seen when the MSC *Bellissima* from Japan made a port call last Thursday. It brought in over 3,000 visitors to Saipan for one day.

Concepcion said both the increase in the number of flights and the incoming port calls come at a crucial time as the tourism industry's low season usually begins around March.

"With the expected increase in arrivals during the Lunar New Year period next month, tourism industry stakeholders are eager to see an additional influx of visitors to our islands. This comes at a crucial time in the year when we expect low season to kick in toward March and April. The 10 additional flights by Jeju Air from Seoul plus the cruise ships scheduled to dock [on] Saipan next month are welcome news for the industry. We need a solid third source market to eventually stabilize our industry, with Korea being very dominant and Japan being very weak. We are hopeful for a brighter future," said Concepcion.

FEMALE

From page 1

husband. The incident was reported to police last Thursday.

Meanwhile, *Saipan Tribune* learned from a credible source that the woman's family members have arrived to be by their loved one's side.

During a press conference last week, Sato said that 911 received a call last Saturday morning from a woman who stated that there might be injured people in an apartment in Finasisu. It was later determined that the female caller is a colleague of the female victim. Both are teachers at a local private school.

The woman reportedly told police that the female victim had not reported for work, so she went to their residence to do a welfare check and panicked at the sight of blood when she looked through one of the home's windows, so she immediately looked for help.

At the scene and immediately upon entering the home, police found traces of blood leading into one of the bedrooms, Sato said. Upon entering the bedroom, police immediately saw a man lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with the female lying nearby and whose face was also covered in blood.

Sato said investigators are also reaching out to close friends, acquaintances, and colleagues of the couple to get more details about the pair's lives.

The only information DPS has been able to release about the pair is that the man is a known electrician, the woman is a private school teacher, both are in their 50s, and both are Chinese nationals. "They are both legal residents with green cards and are long-time residents of the island," Sato said.

DPS continues to ask for the public's help and to say something if they hear or see anything.

"We have been receiving tips from the Crime Stoppers hotline so investigators are actively pursuing the tips coming in. We do not have potential suspects at this time and the case remains an open investigation. We would hope that, if the public had seen anything unusual or suspicious, go ahead and give us a call. Investigators have been working through the evening as well. As you know, we are a small department so cases like this, everyone…combine their efforts to work on this particular case. DPS Commissioner Clement Bermudes has all boots on the ground working this case," said Sato.

About 20 men and women from the DPS Criminal Investigation Bureau are currently working on the case.

MACARANAS

From page 1

serve a crucial role in rehabilitating inmates—a complete change from his role as an arresting officer.

Macaranas officially began his new role yesterday.

"Coming back into the government sector, it's a nice feeling. I like being back at work. When I first started in DOC, for a few months, I was placed in the Division of Corrections. So, I am not really new to the system, and I believe I have some [knowledge] about how it's run. Now as deputy commissioner, I could learn a lot more. It's going to be [a challenge] because I've been filling this building up as a police officer. Now I have to find ways to transition these individuals out. So part of the task is to find ways to help these individuals and make them ready to return to the community. You cannot just house them, feed them, watch them; we also have to find ways to help them so that when they return to the community, they will be productive citizens instead of going out and being idle out there. We need to help them find their livelihoods for when they leave this institution," he said.

Macaranas believes it is his calling to work for the government and in public safety, so when DOC Commissioner Anthony Torres called him about the position, he finally gave in this month.

"Since June 1, 2023, commissioner Torres has been calling me constantly about the position. But I believe it's a calling [for me]. So, I decided to take on the position and help him and help the institution. I'm not here for any personal interests or personal gain. I'm here to give back to the community," he said.

The former assistant chief of police is working with DOC without pay and does not plan to receive a salary for his role as deputy commissioner.

"To be clear, I'm not getting a salary from the government. I'm still receiving retirement pay. I'm working pro bono for DOC. I don't plan to receive a salary. I just want to give back to the government and to provide my services [for the community]," he said.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

M2 Fitness Christmas Celebration

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Fitness held its annual Christmas celebration last Dec. 22 at the Saipan World Resort Saipan.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Ocean Fires was the grand prize winner of the annual Christmas celebration's group performance competition.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Bernard Lopez prevailed in this M2 Fitness' 60-day Body Transformation competition that was awarded during the annual Christmas celebration.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Kikay Sirens finished second in the annual Christmas celebration's group performance competition.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/

The judges for the group performance competition. From left, Simon Odoca, Joan Aquino, Sen. Jude Hofschneider (R-Tinian), Derrick Cutting, and Dee Clayton.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Fitness officers, led by president Mary Grace Bautista, second from left, along with the M2 tech and shadow teams pose for a group photo.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Ocean Pearls finished third in the annual Christmas celebration's group performance competition.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Zumba Kids and M2 Zumba Juniors also performed during the annual Christmas celebration.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sen. Jude Hofschneider (R-Tinian) served as the keynote speaker of M2 Fitness' annual Christmas celebration.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Rochelle Juangco was awarded Star of the Night. She is seen here with the rest of the contenders.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

M2 Fitness' 60-day Body Transformation competition winner Bernard Lopez, second from right, with one of the judges, Derrick Cutting, and the rest of the participants of the challenge.

USCG administers Certificate of Compliance exam on MSC *Bellissima*

By SARA MUIR
U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam

U.S. COAST GUARD/CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER JENNIFER THOMAS//
A team from U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam and the U.S. Coast Guard Cruise Ship National Center of Expertise conduct a Certificate of Compliance (COC) exam on the 1,036-foot Maltese-flagged cruise ship MSC *Bellissima* on its first-ever U.S. port call at the Port of Guam, on Jan. 3, 2024. The U.S. Coast Guard conducts COC exams for new or existing vessels that are embarking passengers from a U.S. port for the first time, carrying U.S. citizens as passengers with initial port calls at U.S. ports, or have undergone significant modifications or alterations including changes that affect structural fire protection or means of egress, in order to ensure these vessels, meet required safety and regulatory standards.

SANTA RITA, Guam—In a vital operation reflecting its commitment to community and maritime safety, U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam successfully conducted a Certificate of Compliance examination on the MSC *Bellissima*, a 1,036-foot cruise ship flagged out of Malta, at the Port of Guam on Jan. 3, 2023.

This examination underscores the U.S. Coast Guard's role in maritime safety and its integral part in bolstering local commerce and tourism, which are lifelines of the island's economy.

"This is our first cruise ship exam since 2018 and the largest since the *Norwegian Joy* in 2016. This vessel, coming from Japan and making its first U.S. port call, required an exam to certify its readiness to carry U.S. passengers in U.S. waters, a critical step in ensuring safety compliance," said Chief Warrant Officer Jennifer Thomas, an inspector with U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam.

The examination team, consisting of four inspectors from U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam and two from the Coast Guard National Cruise Ship Center of Expertise in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, meticulously evaluated the ship's adherence to international and U.S. maritime safety norms.

"COC exams are crucial for ensuring vessels entering U.S. ports meet our and international stringent safety and regulatory standards. They play a vital role in safeguarding passengers and crew which also supports the economic framework of Guam by facilitating safe and secure maritime commerce," said Lt. Jay DeInnocentiis, chief of waterways, explaining the strategic importance of these examinations. "The officers and crew were extremely professional and the ship, built in 2019, was in excellent condition with only a few minor issues corrected on the spot."

The COC exam verifies that the ship and crew comply with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea and other relevant International Maritime Organization regulations. The inspectors conduct the COC exam holistically, viewing shipboard material conditions combined with ship operations as a single system. This system, when combined with the aspects of human factors and influences, forms the overall ability of the vessel to operate safely. The exam focuses on the performance of officers and crew with specific attention to their training. It also verifies the ship's compliance with lifeboat and liferaft deployment route requirements.

Prior to the vessel's mooring, the U.S. Coast Guard's Sector Boarding Team performed a security boarding, arriving offshore aboard a 45-foot Response Boat-Medium from U.S. Coast Guard Station Apra Harbor. The station crews also provided a security escort for the vessel, in a coordinated approach to maritime security.

Following its Guam visit, the MSC *Bellissima* and crew proceeded to Saipan, where U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment Saipan and Sector Boarding Team members further ensured compliance with security requirements, demonstrating the U.S. Coast Guard's far-reaching commitment to maritime security and safety across the region.

This successful COC exam of the MSC *Bellissima* is a testament to the U.S. Coast Guard's dedication to the highest maritime safety standards and its pivotal role in facilitating commerce and tourism. These efforts contribute significantly to the economic vitality of Guam and the wider region and fortify the U.S. Coast Guard's commitment to being an integral part of the community, ensuring safe, secure, and efficient marine transportation systems.

CONGRATULATIONS CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Mariah Deleon Guerrero graduated from Air Force Basic Military Training last Jan. 3 at Lackland Airforce Base in San Antonio, Texas. She graduated with a rank of E2 Airman. Deleon Guerrero's parents are Farrah Ann Borja and Mariano Deleon Guerrero.

USCG team advances maritime safety in Palau with workshops, donation

U.S. COAST GUARD
U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy members stand for a photo with community members in the Republic of Palau following a boating safety class on Dec. 28, 2023. The U.S. Coast Guard regularly works with partners in the Republic of Palau; this series of events was part of Pacific Partnership 2024, which is now, in its 19th iteration, the largest multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission conducted in the region.

By SARA MUIR
U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam

KOROR, Palau—In a critical effort to enhance maritime safety, a team from U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam led a series of Safe Boating Workshops in the Republic of Palau on Dec. 26-30, 2023.

The initiative, part of a broader commitment to regional safety and cooperation, involved hands-on training and donating vital safety equipment to local boaters. The workshops coincided with the USNS *Mercy* visit to Palau, marking a significant contribution to the Pacific Partnership efforts.

Throughout the week, the FM/SG team, comprising two marine science technicians, a maritime law enforcement specialist, and the FM/SG Compact of Free Association liaison officer, traveled across four Palauan states. They engaged with Palau State Rangers, fishers, and boaters, focusing on practical and effective maritime safety measures. The FM/SG CG team worked with Civic Action team Palau, currently crewed by the U.S. Army engineers and a U.S. Navy aviation rescue swimmer, to present and deliver whistles, safety checklists, and signaling mirrors to attendees in Ngaraad, Airai, Ngchesar and Ngarchelong states.

Highlighting the importance of these workshops, Lt. Anna Maria Vaccaro, the COFA liaison officer and team lead, emphasized the lifesaving potential of such knowledge and equipment.

"Any information or equipment that we can provide has the chance to save a life while out at sea. As much as we can teach our Palauan neighbors, we can always learn from them, too. We listened to a story from a fisherman who was stranded at sea for three days after the propeller fell off his outboard motor. When he spotted a plane flying overhead, he poured gasoline into the water and lit it on fire to get the plane's attention. He was rescued six hours later."

While the U.S. Coast Guard does not advocate pouring fuel into the water, the event truly showcases the endurance and creativity of Pacific Island fishers. Gasoline is a very light fuel oil that evaporates quickly and, in this case, was reportedly consumed by the fire.

The FM/SG team capitalized on their visit by engaging in recruitment activities. They met with a future U.S. Coast Guard recruit slated to attend basic training in early 2024 for a physical fitness test. They also discussed U.S. Coast Guard Academy life and application processes with Palauan high school seniors, fostering future maritime leadership.

This visit strengthened maritime safety practices and further cemented the enduring partnership between the U.S. Coast Guard and Palau. As a next step, the U.S. Coast Guard plans a multi-agency search and rescue exercise in Palau in 2024, continuing to solidify this crucial alliance.

Native Hawaiian salt makers combat climate change, pollution to protect sacred tradition

AP

Kekanemekala Taniguchi, son of Tina Taniguchi, smooths wet black clay onto the wall of a salt bed in the Hanapepe salt patch on Wednesday, July 12, 2023, in Hanapepe, Hawaii.

HANAPEPE, Hawaii (AP)—On a warm summer afternoon, Tina Taniguchi was on her hands and knees scraping dirt off an oblong depression in the ground. Thick brown hair peeked out from her coconut leaf hat. Splotches of mud stuck to her T-shirt and speckled her smiling face.

Taniguchi smiles a lot when she's working in her corner of the Hanapepe salt patch on the west side of Kauai—a terracotta plot of land about the size of a football field—dappled with elliptical pools of brine, crystallizing in clay beds.

"It's hard work, but for me it's also play," Taniguchi said, adding with a laugh, "I play in the mud all day."

Taniguchi's family is one of 22 who over generations have dedicated themselves to the cultural and spiritual practice of "paakai," the Hawaiian word for salt. This is one of the last remaining salt patches in Hawaii. Its sacred salt can be traded or given away, but must never be sold. Hawaiians use it in cooking, healing, rituals and as protection.

Over the past decade, this tract has been under constant threat due to development, pollution from a neighboring airfield, sand erosion from vehicle traffic and littering by visitors to the adjacent beach.

In addition, climate change threatens to obliterate the practice with rising sea levels and modified weather patterns. This year, the salt-making season lasted barely three months from July to September because of above-average rainfall. During a good year, work typically begins in May and ends in November.

Taniguchi drives about an hour to get here. For her, it's church and play rolled into one—the time she forges a spiritual connection to the land.

"This would be a religious practice of mine for sure," Taniguchi said. "My dad raised us saying that these mountains are his church, and the ocean is where you get cleansed."

Malia Nobrega-Olivera's grandfather was instrumental in forming the group of salt-making families called Hui Hana Paakai. She is also an educator and activist who leads efforts to preserve this centuries-old tradition. The organization's goal, she said, is to speak with a collective voice when communicating with the landowner, the state of Hawaii, whenever issues arise. Nobrega-Olivera said the salt patch is part of lands taken away from Native Hawaiians after the U.S.-backed overthrow of Hawaii's monarchy in 1893.

"Regardless of what a piece of paper might say, we are stewards of the area and this land is our 'kupuna' (elder)," she said.

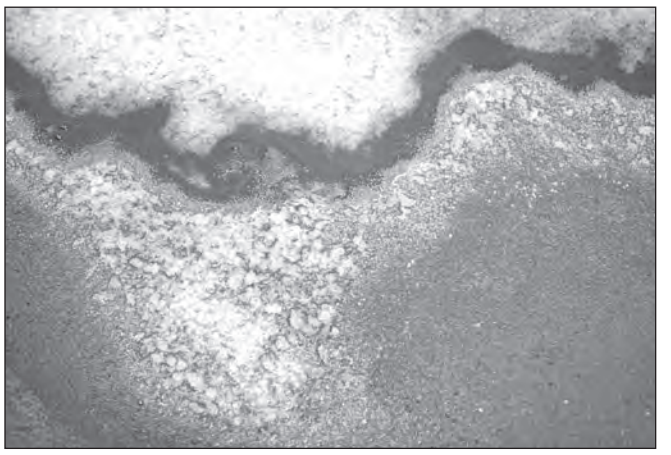
Nobrega-Olivera looks fondly at black-and-white photos of her grandparents, uncles and aunts from about five decades ago, standing near hillocks of shimmering salt. Back then, they would give away 5-gallon buckets. Today, they hand out salt in sandwich bags. Trading salt for other items continues to this day, she said, adding that her late father once traded salt with a man who was selling piglets on Craigslist.

Born from the need to preserve fish and other meats, the process of turning sea water into salt can be slow and grueling. The season begins once rain stops and waters recede, exposing the salt beds. Ocean water travels underground and enters the wells. Each family has their own well, known as a "puna." As water enters the well, so do tiny, red brine shrimp, giving Hanapepe salt its unique sweetness, said Nobrega-Olivera.

Eventually, water from the wells is moved into the salt beds, which have been cleaned and lined with rich black clay. There, layers of salt crystals form. Typically, the top layer, which is the whitest, is used as table salt. The middle layer, pinkish, is used in cooking while the bottom layer, with a deep red hue, is used in blessings and rituals.

AP

Roz Choi, left, and friend Eddie Topenio, tend to Choi's family salt beds onSunday, July 9, 2023, in Hanapepe, Hawaii. The Choi family is one of 22 who over generations have dedicated themselves to the cultural and spiritual practice of "paakai," or Hawaiian salt.



AP

Salt begins to form in one of many salt beds in the Hanapepe salt patch on Friday, July 14, 2023, in Hanapepe, Hawaii. This Native Hawaiian salt has been hand made for generations and is one of the last remaining salt patches in all of Hawaii.

After the Maui fires in August that claimed 100 lives, spiritual practitioners there specifically requested white Hanapepe salt from Nobrega-Olivera to bless and "calm" the traumatized island, particularly areas that housed makeshift morgues. The salt makers continue to send their salt to survivors who are rebuilding their lives, so they can "make their food delicious and bring some of that joy into their lives," she said.

Nobrega-Olivera believes Hanapepe salt has the power to ward off bad energy.

"When I walk into a difficult meeting, I put a salt crystal on my tongue as a reminder to watch my words."

Many of the salt-making families are Christian. Nobrega-Olivera said reconciling their Christian faith with their spirituality as Native Hawaiians can be challenging, but it happens organically.

"There are some gatherings where we may honor our deities," she said. "Other occasions may call for a Christian prayer in Hawaiian or English, or both. You do what feels right for that space."

Nobrega-Olivera believes Western science and Indigenous knowledge can combine to combat the effects of climate change and save the salt patch. The steps include building up the wells' edges so when sea levels rise, the water won't inundate the area. Another important step: preventing sand dune erosion from vehicle traffic to the beach, which causes the waves to crest and flood the patch.

"Some ask us why we can't move this practice to a different location," she said. "That's impossible because our cultural practice is particular to this land. There are elements here that make this place special for making this type of salt. You cannot find that anywhere else."

Those working on the salt patches enter with reverence. Nobrega-Olivera said menstruating women typically do not come and red clothes are avoided.

Kanani Santos said he removes his shoes before entering because he likes to "be connected to the ground." He enjoys walking there at sunset, when the brick-red patch of land appears bathed in gold and the salt crystals sparkle like magic dust.

"I say a little prayer, ask for blessings to have a good harvest, to have a quiet soul and to embrace the moment," he said.

Kurt Kuali'i, a chef whose family has made salt for 10 generations, choked up when speaking about this as his "kuleana," which means responsibility.

"I get moments of silence here like church," he said. "I believe in akua (god), a higher power. This is where I come to connect with that higher power, teach the children and be with family. There's good energy here."

Even when rain disrupts an entire day's work, Kuali'i says he knows it's "God telling us it's not time yet, to slow down." The best part of salt making is giving it all away, he said.

"Sharing is Hawaiian. This is something you make with your hands. I may not be the best at everything, but I can make Hawaiian salt."

Kane Turalde has been coming to the salt patch since he was 7. He is 68 now, a Native Hawaiian educator and canoe-racing coach. He has protested in the past to block luxury homes and other development near the salt patch, which he says would have created more traffic and pollution.

"I always come here in the spirit of akua," he said. "Before I leave home, I call my ancestors here so when I arrive, they are here."

In his family's home, Turalde's grandmother kept a bowl of salt by the door. Everyone would take a pinch and say a prayer before going out, for protection, he said.

With the resurgence of Hawaiian culture and language on the islands, Nobrega-Olivera said she now thinks about how to transmit this knowledge to younger generations.

One way she honors the Hanapepe salt patch is by composing "mele," or Hawaiian songs and chants. She recently taught some school children one of those chants whose chorus is "aloha aina," which means "love of the land." Her eyes welled up as she saw their enthusiasm to learn the mele.

"Aloha aina captures our philosophy, the reason we do this," Nobrega-Olivera said. "You take care of the land, and the land takes care of you."

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 6

Published daily at 2/F JP Center,
Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI
Mailing Address: PMB 34, Box 10001, Saipan, MP, 96950

Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Hydrogen isn't clean if it adds to climate pollution. Biden's rules are a good start

The Inflation Reduction Act, signed by President Joe Biden more than a year ago, is a game-changing law that invests hundreds of billions of dollars to fight climate change and boost renewable energy.

It includes lucrative tax credits aimed at making it cheaper to produce clean hydrogen, which are expected to funnel more than $100 billion in taxpayer funds toward this nascent technology. As a fuel that releases only water vapor when burned, hydrogen is a promising tool to slash emissions from industries that will be harder to clean up through electrification, such as steel, cement, aviation and long-distance trucking.

But the climate benefits of hydrogen evaporate if they are made with fossil fuels. That's why it's important that federal officials ensure the most valuable incentives only support truly "green" hydrogen projects that do not add to carbon emissions. And it's why it was something of a relief to see the Biden administration release unexpectedly stringent rules last month requiring that hydrogen projects meet rigorous life-cycle emissions standards to qualify for the most generous tax credits.

It's much cheaper to produce hydrogen with methane, a highly polluting fossil fuel, than with electricity. These subsidies are designed to upend those economics by making hydrogen produced with renewable energy cost-competitive.

Clean hydrogen is produced by splitting water molecules using massive amounts of electricity. These power-hungry projects can hog clean energy from other users and actually drive up consumption of fossil fuels.

To avoid this, environmentalists pushed to have hydrogen projects meet strict requirements to be eligible for the most generous tax credits of $3 per kilogram of "clean" hydrogen.

The Treasury Department standards released last month largely adhere to these principles, to the delight of environmentalists and the consternation of business groups, which pushed for laxer requirements, and fossil-fuel-friendly politicians. There are details yet to be worked out, but federal officials are on the right track.

Being strict about what counts as green and clean is the right thing to do for the climate, as is reserving the greatest incentives to hydrogen production that actually reduces planet-warming emissions. Consumer advocates also have appropriately emphasized that such guidelines are needed to protect regular people from rising electricity rates that could result from hydrogen projects diverting power from existing renewable energy sources.

Clean hydrogen is still in its infancy, and state and federal leaders should monitor how these incentives are helping to grow a sustainable industry. We can't afford to squander tens of billions of federal climate funding on projects with questionable environmental effects.

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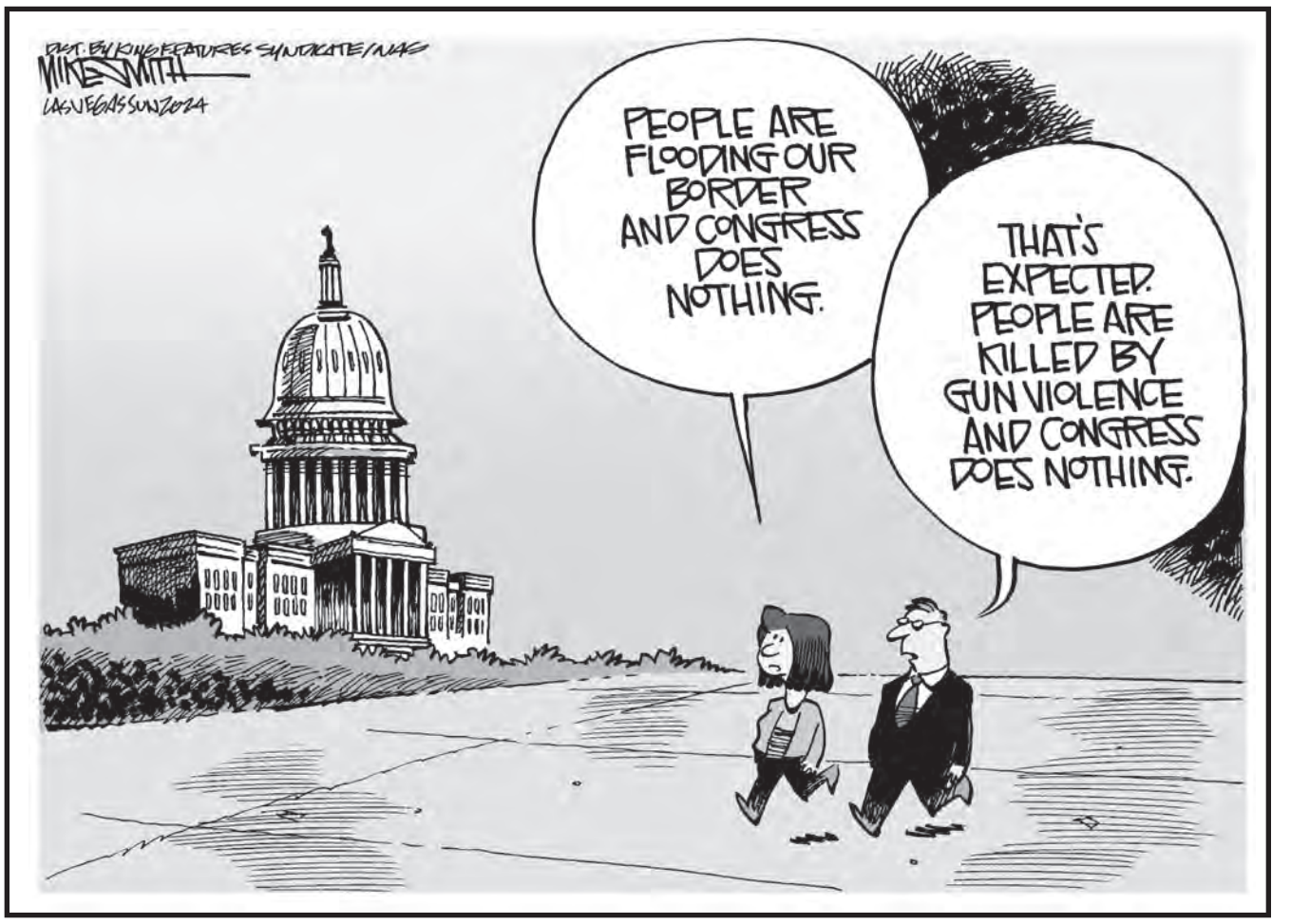
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PEOPLE ARE FLOODING OUR BORDER AND CONGRESS DOES NOTHING.
THAT'S EXPECTED. PEOPLE ARE KILLED BY GUN VIOLENCE AND CONGRESS DOES NOTHING.

Resolutions aren't the key to a happier new year. Here's where to start

By CASSIE HOLMES
Los Angeles Times

Cassie Holmes, a professor of marketing and behavioral decision-making at UCLA's Anderson School of Management, is the author of Happier Hour.

We tend to look to the new year as a new beginning, as an opportunity for a fresh start. Aspiring for something different, something better, we devise resolutions in hopes of making ourselves healthier, more productive, more successful…but really, the end goal is to be happier: to feel satisfied rather than wanting at this same time next year.

We seek ingredients for this new and better life from magazine headlines and "how to" experts promising that a new year might indeed transform each of us into a "new you." However, nobody needs outside guidance or expertise to identify their sources of satisfaction. We don't have to search for something new and different. The best indicator of what will make us happy is what has made us happy.

I teach a course to UCLA graduate business students and executives called Applying the Science of Happiness to Life Design. The objective of the 10-week elective is straightforward: to guide students toward enjoying greater satisfaction in their days, careers and lives overall. I introduce them to a multitude of findings from academic research across the fields of psychology and behavioral decision-making, but the students' most important lessons come from the assignments that push them to reflect on their own experiences.

> We don't have to search for something new and different. The best indicator of what will make us happy is what has made us happy.

One of these assignments is remarkably simple. It takes only a few minutes, and you could do it right now. Reflecting over your past year, what were the times when you felt the greatest joy? Think about it for a moment, and jot down the five activities from the past 12 months that you experienced as happiest. It is these activities that made you feel happy before that hold the greatest promise to make you feel happy in the future.

Notice, this is different from me asking you about what activities in general make you happiest. That question is unhelpfully vague and potentially daunting. Without the defined time frame of the past 12 months, it leads to answers based on abstract beliefs, rather than your actual experiences, which can prove misleading in pursuing happiness.

If you're nervous about the accuracy of your recall of the past dozen months or you're someone who gains confidence from data, you could also do the time-tracking assignment. Over the course of a week, for each half-hour you're awake, write down what activity you did and how you felt on a 10-point scale. For these ratings, reflect honestly on how satisfied and fulfilled you felt coming out of that activity. Though it may seem tedious to track your time for a whole week, looking back across your numbers to identify your emotional high points can be surprisingly illuminating.

You're likely to notice which modes of socializing feel most meaningful for you. You'll see which work activities or tasks are the most rewarding. Even though you might have thought of evening TV watching as a prize and you have dreaded exercise, your data could very well reveal your couch time as meh and exercise as energizing or even fun, especially when done in a particular setting or with a particular workout buddy.

These assignments are more useful than broad "top New Year's resolution tips" drawn from the experiences of swaths of people, many of whose circumstances and preferences are quite different from yours. Your own prior experiences offer far more information and precise guidance about what will make you happy going forward.

A similar strategy can guide your approach not only to the year ahead but for many years to come. To find what is likely to produce lasting happiness in your life, you could ask someone who is closer to the end of theirs to look back. Yet another assignment I give my students is to ask an elder who has lived a good life —someone who is happy and views their past with satisfaction instead of regret— to reflect on their sources of pride. Ask an elder you admire what brought them the greatest joy over the years. Their past experiences, much like your own, can inform your future decisions.

Take a look back to identify your sources of happiness, and resolve for these next 12 months to protect time for them amid the busyness of life.

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The US is facing the biggest COVID wave since omicron. Why are we still playing make-believe?

By ERIC J. TOPOL
Los Angeles Times

Eric J. Topol is a professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research and author of the Substack newsletter Ground Truths.

The pandemic is far from over, as evidenced by the rapid rise to global dominance of the JN.1 variant of SARS-CoV-2. This variant is a derivative of BA.2.86, the only other strain that has carried more than 30 new mutations in the spike protein since omicron first came on the scene more than two years ago. This should have warranted designation by the World Health Organization as a variant of concern with a Greek letter, such as pi.

By wastewater levels, JN.1 is now associated with the second-biggest wave of infections in the United States in the pandemic, after omicron. We have lost the ability to track the actual number of infections since most people either test at home or don't even test at all, but the very high wastewater levels of the virus indicate about 2 million Americans are getting infected each day.

In several countries in Europe, wastewater levels reached unprecedented levels, exceeding omicron. Clearly this virus variant, with its plethora of new mutations, has continued its evolution with mutations adapted for infecting or reinfecting us.

There is, however, some good news about this big wave of infections. It has not resulted in the surge of hospital admissions seen with omicron. The "updated" booster (based on the XBB.1.5 variant that rose to dominance in the U.S. in February), available here since September, has some cross-reactivity with JN.1 in lab studies for inducing neutralizing antibodies to the virus, and a recent Kaiser Permanente report showed the booster provided protection from hospitalization in the range of about 60% against JN.1 and other recently circulating variants.

With the marked differences in the spike protein between XBB.1.5 and JN.1, we are very lucky to see this level of vaccine-induced immune response. Nevertheless, only 19% of eligible Americans have gotten the updated booster. The Kaiser study also showed low levels of protection against hospitalization and emergency room visits for people who had received only prior versions of the vaccine, without the updated booster. That aligns with even more striking differences in the virus sequence of early strains compared with JN.1, and the problem we have with waning immunity four to six months after vaccination.

All of this is occurring on top of the flu and RSV waves, both of which are at very high levels, not clearly having peaked yet, with some people experiencing two of these infections at once.

With all three respiratory viruses circulating at full force, you would think we'd be seeing people wearing masks everywhere in public. That couldn't be further from the truth. The state of denialism and general refusal to take simple steps to reduce the risk of infection can be seen everywhere.

It has taken health care systems many weeks after JN.1 showed up in October to recognize the threat. Only very recently have some reinstated mask mandates for health care workers and patients. Little has been done across the country to improve indoor air quality, upgrading filtration and ventilation.

Now in its fifth year, SARS-CoV-2 has once again proved to be highly resilient, capable of reinventing itself to infect us. Yet we continue to make-believe that the pandemic is over, that infections have been transformed to common cold status by prior exposure(s), and that life has returned to normal. Sadly, none of this is true.

The massive number of infections in the current wave will undoubtedly lead to more people suffering from long COVID. For a high proportion of people, especially those of advanced age, immunocompromised or with coexisting conditions, getting COVID is nothing close to a straightforward respiratory infection.

What is the exit strategy that could get us to "return to normal"? It certainly can't happen with the current complacency and false belief that the virus will burn out and go away. Inevitably, there will be another strain in the future that we are not at all prepared for and will lead to yet another very big wave across the planet.

Still, there has been exciting new data on oral, inhaled vaccines that achieve high levels of mucosal immunity and protection against infections, which would be variant proof. The U.S. has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to rev up clinical trials for two different nasal vaccines with promising early clinical trial data, and for improved, variant-proof shots with better protection and durability. But most of these efforts started only recently and are not getting urgent priority for completion during 2024, nothing like what we saw with Operation Warp Speed in 2020.

It's crickets from the White House on COVID now, with no messaging on getting the updated booster or masking. The Biden administration has done far too little to accelerate research on effective treatments for long COVID.

This passivity reinforces the illusion that the pandemic is behind us when it's actually raging. And this season will be followed by a more quiescent period, which will, once again, lull us into thinking the pandemic is over. But there is no getting over it until we recognize reality and double down on the research that will allow us to block infections and virus spread, and achieve lasting, variant-proof immunity.

America has a new Axis of Evil to prevent

By ANDREAS KLUTH
Bloomberg Opinion

Andreas Kluth is a Bloomberg Opinion *columnist covering U.S. diplomacy, national security and geopolitics. Previously, he was editor-in-chief of* Handelsblatt Global *and a writer for the* Economist.

Since Feb. 24, 2022, and especially since Oct. 7, 2023, a specter has haunted the world and worried President Joe Biden in particular: Will Russia's war against Ukraine, or Israel's against Hamas, draw in other belligerents, perhaps even culminating in World War III?

Biden has therefore done everything in his power to support Ukraine and Israel while also keeping the U.S. and its Western allies out of direct confrontations with Russia, Hamas' backers in Iran, and their Chinese and North Korean quasi-allies. But conflicts change unpredictably. Every vagary increases the risk that an artillery round fired over here sends missiles flying over there and detonates a bigger blow-up.

Imagine, for example, a scenario that may seem far-fetched, but no more so than the odds in June 1914 that a deadly bullet fired in the Balkans by a Serbian nationalist at an Austrian prince should make Germany violate the neutrality of Belgium and cause the Great Powers of Europe to go to war.

Today's version might run as follows. The mullahs in Tehran have just dispatched a warship to the Red Sea, where the Iran-backed Houthis have been attacking container ships, and a U.S.-led flotilla policing the waters has sunk several Houthi boats in response. In future Houthi attacks and American counter-strikes, the Iranian destroyer must be seen to support its Houthi allies. So the Iranians could fire at the Americans, who'd shoot back and win the skirmish.

Tehran's other proxies—its so-called Axis of Resistance stretching from Lebanon to Syria, Iraq, and Yemen—would then attack more Israeli or American targets. The Iranian mullahs will also order their own direct strikes, which the U.S. and its allies will answer. At that point, the two nations are, de facto if not de jure, at war. Other powers in the region, from Turkey and Saudi Arabia to the Gulf states, will mobilize just to be ready.

Simultaneously, Russia, China and North Korea will rethink their own calculus. None of them has a formal mutual-defense alliance with the others or with Iran. But they have formed connections and understandings that American pundits and politicians are now calling a new Axis of Evil. The implication is that they would either stick up for one another or opportunistically kindle their own fires.

That term "axis" is of course doubly loaded. It evokes the Axis of Germany, Italy and Japan during the last century and the "Axis of Evil" that former President George W. Bush invoked this century in the run-up to his invasion of Iraq. For Bush, the evil trio consisted of Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

Bush's linkage of those three was iffy. Baghdad and Tehran had fought a bloody war and were united only by mutual loathing. Neither of them cared about Pyongyang's interests, nor its dictator about theirs. But all in their own way saw Washington as the Great Satan and fantasized about slaying the beast.

Today's autocratic quartet of Iran, Russia, China and North Korea has more in common than W's trio did. China and Russia have declared a "no-limits" friendship, and even though Beijing is wary of the Kremlin, it wants to prevent Russia from losing in Ukraine and is buying its oil and other goods to circumvent Western sanctions. Iran is supplying Russia with drones to kill Ukrainians, and North Korea is sending ammo for the same purpose. Beijing and Moscow support Pyongyang. Everyone owes the others something.

Each member of this axis nonetheless has different aims. Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to subdue Ukraine and also eyes Moldova and other post-Soviet states, while claiming to defend Russia against the entire decadent West. His Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, wants to absorb Taiwan and also to bully American partners such as the Philippines out of the South China Sea.

Then there's Pyongyang's Kim Jong Un, who's apparently decided to avail himself of the world's preoccupation with Gaza to brandish his growing arsenal of nukes at South Korea, Japan and the U.S. In year-end speeches, he urged his army to get ready for war and "to sharpen the treasured sword" (that is, his atom bombs). Last year he launched a spy satellite and tested almost 30 ballistic missiles, many of which can reach the U.S.; this year, he'll probably try out many more.

Iran, Russia, China and North Korea aren't an axis in the sense of coordinating their strategy. But they may yet behave like an axis if they think the U.S. is distracted by the war in Gaza, paralyzed by domestic polarization, or exhausted from overstretch. For they all agree that Washington is the ultimate enemy. If the U.S. fights any one of them, the others may be tempted to open additional fronts.

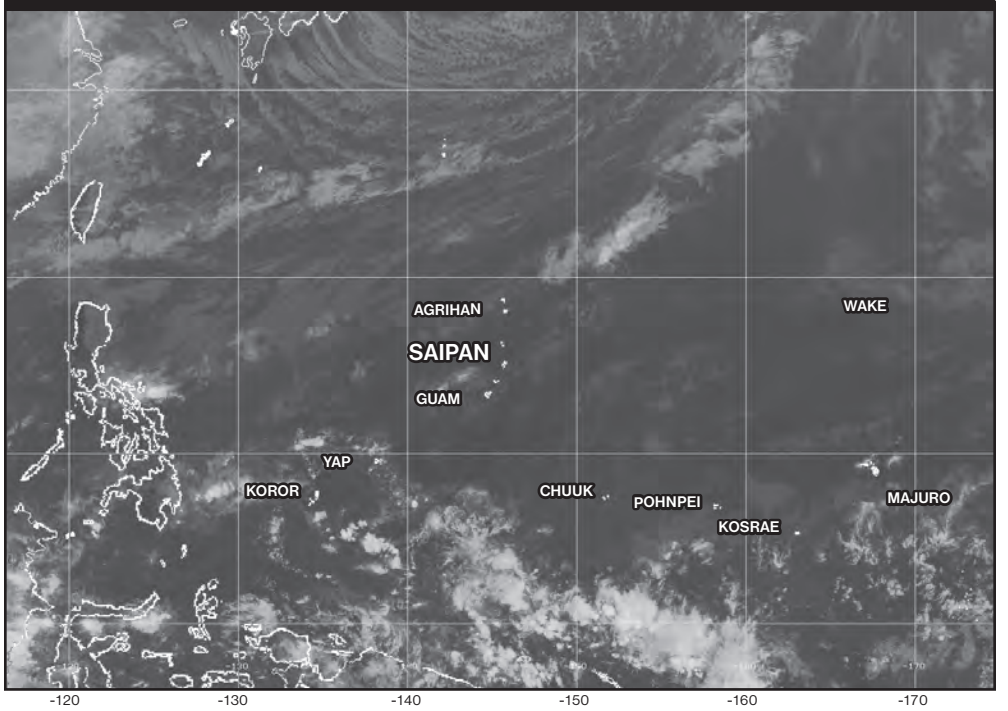
Keeping them at bay will be hard, although Biden has the right strategy. It includes building variable alliances in Europe, the Middle East and Asia to stare down each adversary separately. It also entails trying to split Beijing from any emerging Axis of Evil by persuading Xi that China, as the world's only other potential superpower, nowadays shares custody of world peace with the U.S. This, in fact, may be the world's last best hope: An unlikely triumph of dual Sino-American leadership. We could call it an Axis of Stability.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
86 / 78°	87 / 77°	87 / 77°	87 / 77°	87 / 77°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 7:38 AM MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Mostly cloudy skies reign over the Marianas with light isolated showers. Combined seas are holding at 6 to 7 feet.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	85° / 77°
Palau	Cloudy	84° / 78°
Yap	Cloudy	83° / 77°
Chuuk	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	84° / 79°
Kosrae	Partly Cloudy	84° / 80°
Majuro	Thunderstorms	84° / 80°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:45 AM	6:02 PM
Wednesday	6:45 AM	6:02 PM
Thursday	6:45 AM	6:03 PM
Friday	6:46 AM	6:03 PM
Saturday	6:46 AM	6:04 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	4:15 AM	3:38 PM	-
Wednesday	5:18 AM	4:39 PM	-
Thursday	6:22 AM	5:44 PM	-
Friday	7:22 AM	6:51 PM	-
Saturday	8:18 AM	7:57 PM	-

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Cloudy	76° / 65°
Beijing	Sunny	22° / 8°
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	61° / 44°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	81° / 69°
London	Partly Cloudy	38° / 30°
Los Angeles	Partly Cloudy	72° / 48°
Manila	Partly Cloudy	88° / 75°
Melbourne	Mostly Sunny	77° / 54°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	75° / 68°
New York	Sunny	46° / 27°
Osaka	Showers	43° / 30°
Paris	Mostly Cloudy	39° / 32°
Busan	Partly Cloudy/Wind	26° / 13°
Rome	Showers	51° / 41°
Salem	Rain	52° / 40°
San Francisco	Cloudy	57° / 49°
Seoul	Mostly Sunny	13° / -2°
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	54° / 31°
Washington, DC	Mostly Sunny	44° / 29°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
7:24 AM	High Tide	1.58
12:05 PM	Low Tide	1.19
4:52 PM	High Tide	1.66
-	-	-

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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SUBSCRIPTION Published Monday to Friday, Saipan Tribune offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of $180. For additional subscription information, call (670) 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/703	3:10AM	10:30PM	4, 7 via ICN
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4,7
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
OZ702/625	12:05PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6 via ICN
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily
OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Congressional leaders announce deal on spending levels

WASHINGTON (AP)—Congressional leaders have reached an agreement on overall spending levels for the current fiscal year that could help avoid a partial government shutdown later this month.

The agreement largely hews to spending caps for defense and domestic programs that Congress set as part of a bill to suspend the debt limit until 2025. But it does provide some concessions to House Republicans who viewed the spending restrictions in that agreement as insufficient.

In a letter to colleagues, House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday the agreement would secure $16 billion in additional spending cuts from the previous agreement brokered by then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy and President Joe Biden and is about $30 billion less than what the Senate was considering.

"This represents the most favorable budget agreement Republicans have achieved in over a decade," Johnson writes.

AP

House Speaker-elect Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., addresses members of Congress at the Capitol in Washington, Oct. 25, 2023.

Biden said the agreement "moves us one step closer to preventing a needless government shutdown and protecting important national priorities."

"It reflects the funding levels that I negotiated with both parties and signed into law last spring," Biden said in a statement. "It rejects deep cuts to programs hardworking families count on, and provides a path to passing full-year funding bills that deliver for the American people and are free of any extreme policies."

The agreement speeds up the roughly $20 billion in cuts already agreed to for the Internal Revenue Service and rescinds about $6 billion in COVID relief money that had been approved but not yet spent, according to Johnson's letter.

"It's a good deal for Democrats and the country," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told colleagues in a briefing call.

Essentially, Democrats see the trade-offs they made as mild. In a description provided to reporters, they said the COVID savings would have "no significant impact on any current projects or activities in motion." And they said that moving all of the $20.2 billion in IRS cuts to this year instead of over two years would still leave the agency able to maintain "critical investments" that Congress provided in 2022. At the time, Congress provided the IRS with an additional $80 billion that could be spent over 10 years.

Overall, the agreement calls for $886 billion in defense funding. It would provide $772 billion in domestic, non-defense spending, when including $69 billion called for in a side deal to the debt ceiling bill that McCarthy had reached with the White House, Democrats said.

The most conservative House Republicans opposed the earlier debt ceiling agreement and even brought House proceedings to a halt for a few days to show their displeasure. Many were surely wanting additional concessions, but Democrats have been insistent on abiding by the debt ceiling agreement's spending caps, leaving Johnson in a difficult spot.

"It's even worse than we thought," the House Freedom Caucus said of the agreement in a tweet posted on X. "This is total failure."

Lawmakers needed an agreement on overall spending levels so that appropriators could write the bills that set line-by-line funding for agencies. Money is set to lapse Jan. 19 for some agencies and Feb. 2 for others.

The agreement is separate from the negotiations that are taking place to secure additional funding for Israel and Ukraine while also curbing restrictions on asylum claims at the U.S. border.

In a joint statement, Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries voiced their support for the agreement.

"It will also allow us to keep the investments for hardworking American families secured by the legislative achievements of President Biden and Congressional Democrats," Schumer and Jeffries said.

Biden withholds $2M from student loan servicers

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Biden administration is docking more than $2 million in payments to student loan servicers that failed to send billing statements on time after the end of a coronavirus pandemic payment freeze.

The Education Department said Friday it will withhold payments from Aidvantage, EdFinancial and Nelnet for failing to meet their contractual obligations. The servicers failed to send timely statements to more than 750,000 borrowers in the first month of repayment, the agency said.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said his agency will continue to pursue "aggressive oversight" and won't give loan servicers "a free pass for poor performance."

The move is the administration's latest attempt to straighten out a process that has been marred by errors after student loan payments restarted in October. Tens of thousands of borrowers have received billing statements late or with incorrect amounts as servicers scrambled to jumpstart the process.

The department previously withheld $7.2 million from loan servicer MOHELA for failing to send statements on time to more than 2.5 million borrowers. The new action will take $2 million from Aidvantage, $161,000 from EdFinancial and $13,000 from Nelnet, based on the number of borrowers who faced errors.

Nelnet said in a statement that less than 0.04% of its borrowers had missing or late statements, including some who chose to move their due dates up "to better meet their situation."

"While we are confident the number of borrowers with Nelnet-caused billing statement errors is less than the number released we do take seriously our responsibility to borrowers and regret any mistakes made during the extraordinary circumstances of return to repayment," the Nebraska-based company said.

Aidvantage and EdFinancial didn't immediately return messages seeking comment.

Borrowers who did not get statements within the required 21 days before payment will be placed in administrative forbearance while problems are resolved. That means their payments will temporarily be paused and any interest that accrues will be removed. Time spent in forbearance will continue to count toward Public Service Loan Forgiveness and other cancellation through income-driven repayment plans.

"We are committed to providing a seamless repayment experience for borrowers," said Rich Cordray, chief operating officer of Federal Student Aid, the office that oversees federal student loans.

Republicans say the Biden administration's action is an attempt to shift blame elsewhere for a sloppy return to repayment. Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, the top Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said the administration failed to give servicers clear guidance. He has asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate.

More than 22 million borrowers started getting bills again in October after a moratorium that froze payments and interest for more than three years. Bringing that many borrowers online at the same time was an unprecedented task that overwhelmed servicers hired by the government. Many borrowers received bungled bills only to face hours-long wait times for customer service.

To ease borrowers back, the Education Department is offering a one-year "on-ramp" that waives the harshest penalties for borrowers who miss payments. Until next September, borrowers won't be found to be delinquent for missing payments and they won't be subject to debt collection.

Early figures from the Biden administration found that 60% of borrowers with payments due in October had made those payments by mid-November.

Even as payments restart, the administration is working toward a new proposal for widespread student loan cancellation after the Supreme Court rejected Biden's first plan last June.

Canceled flights are piling up as Alaska, United stuck minus grounded Boeing jets

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—Alaska Airlines and United Airlines grounded all of their Boeing 737 Max 9 jetliners again on Sunday while they waited to be told how to inspect the planes to prevent another in-flight blowout like the one that damaged an Alaska jet.

Alaska Airlines had returned 18 of its 65 737 Max 9 aircraft to service Saturday, less than 24 hours after part of the fuselage on another plane blew out three miles (4.8 kilometers) above Oregon.

The reprieve was short-lived.

The airline said Sunday that it received a notice from the Federal Aviation Administration that additional work might be needed on those 18 planes.

Alaska said that it had canceled 170 flights—more than one-fifth of its schedule—by mid-afternoon on the West Coast because of the groundings.

"These aircraft have now also been pulled from service until details about possible additional maintenance work are confirmed with the FAA," the airline said in a statement. "We are in touch with the FAA to determine what, if any, further work is required."

United Airlines said it had scrapped about 180 flights Sunday while salvaging others by finding other planes not covered by the grounding.

Alaska and United are the only U.S. airlines that fly the Max 9.

United said it was waiting for Boeing to issue what is called a multi-operator message, which is a service bulletin used when multiple airlines need to perform similar work on a particular type of plane.

Boeing is working on a bulletin but had not yet submitted it to the FAA, according to a person familiar with the situation. Producing a detailed, technical bulletin frequently takes a couple days, the person said. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the company and regulators have not publicly discussed the process.

Boeing declined to comment.

A panel used to plug an area reserved for an exit door on the Max 9 blew out Friday night shortly after Alaska Airlines flight 1282 took off from Portland, Oregon. The depressurized plane, carrying 171 passengers and six crew members, returned safely to Portland International Airport with no serious injuries.

Nation

US sees drop in illegal border crossings after Mexico increases enforcement

EAGLE PASS, Texas (AP)—Daniel Bermudez's family had fled Venezuela and was headed to the U.S. to seek asylum when the freight train they were riding through Mexico was stopped by immigration officials.

His wife tried to explain that her family had permission to go to the U.S. Instead, they flew her to Mexico's southern border as part of a surge of enforcement actions that U.S. officials say have contributed to a sharp drop in illegal border crossings.

In addition to forcing migrants from trains, Mexico also resumed flying and busing them to the southern part of the country and started flying some home to Venezuela.

Even if temporary, the decrease in illegal crossings is welcome news for the White House. President Joe Biden's administration is locked in talks with Senate negotiators over restricting asylum and $110 billion in aid for Ukraine and Israel hangs in the balance.

Bermudez said his wife became separated from her family when she talked to authorities as he gathered his stepchild and their belongings. He wanted to run, but his wife said they shouldn't because they had followed procedure by making an appointment with U.S. immigration authorities.

"I told her, `Don't trust them. Let's go into the brush,'" Bermudez said, adding that other migrants had fled. He recalled her telling him, "Why are they sending us back if we have an appointment?"

Last week, Bermudez, his stepchild and two other relatives were waiting for her at a shelter in the Mexican border town of Piedras Negras as she took a bus back in hopes of still making the date.

AP

A guardsman stands watch at the U.S.-Mexico border, Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024, in Eagle Pass, Texas.

Mexico's immigration agency sent at least 22 flights from its border region with the U.S. to southern cities during the last 10 days of December, according to Witness at the Border, an advocacy group that tracks flight data. Most were from Piedras Negras, which is across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas.

Mexico also ran two removal flights to Venezuela with 329 migrants. The stretch was punctuated by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Mexico City on Dec. 28 to confront unprecedented crossings to the United States.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said a financial shortfall that had led the immigration agency to suspend deportations and other operations was resolved. He did not offer details.

Arrests for illegal crossings into the U.S. from Mexico fell to about 2,500 on Monday, down from more than 10,000 on several days in December, according to U.S. authorities. In the Border Patrol's busiest area, arrests totaled 13,800 during the seven-day period ending Friday, down 29% from 19,400 two weeks earlier, according to Tucson, Arizona, sector chief John Modlin.

The drop led U.S. Customs and Border Protection to reopen the port of entry in Lukeville, Arizona, on Thursday after a monthlong closure on the most direct route from Phoenix to its nearest beaches. The U.S. also restored operations at Eagle Pass and three other locations.

Merchants in Eagle Pass, a city of about 30,000 people, saw sales take "a major hit" while a bridge was closed to vehicle traffic so border agents could be reassigned to help process migrants, Maverick County Judge Ramsey English Cantu said.

"We survive pretty much from everything that comes from the Mexican side," he said.

Last month, CBP resumed freight crossings in Eagle Pass and El Paso, Texas, after a five-day shutdown that U.S. officials said was a response to as many as 1,000 migrants riding atop a single train through Mexico before trying to walk across the border.

In Piedras Negras on Thursday, Casa del Migrante housed about 200 migrants, down from as high as 1,500 recently.

Among them was Manuel Rodriguez, 40, who said his family will miss their appointment to seek asylum that was made through the U.S. government's CBP One app. He said the appointment was registered with his in-laws, who were deported to Venezuela after authorities boarded the bus they were riding.

"It was all under her name and she lost everything," Rodriguez said.

Proposals being discussed by the White House and Senate negotiators include a new expulsion authority that would deny rights to seek asylum if illegal border crossings reach a certain threshold. Any such authority would almost certainly depend on Mexico's willingness to take back non-Mexicans who enter the U.S illegally, something it does now on a limited scale.

Mexico's support was critical to defunct Trump-era policies that forced 70,000 asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court and to deny rights to seek asylum during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., cautioned against overstating Mexico's role in the recent drop in traffic. Panama reported that less than 25,000 migrants walked through the Darién jungle in December, about half of October's level and a sign that fewer people are leaving South America for the U.S. Migration usually drops in December amid holidays and cold weather.

Winter storms dump snow on both US coasts as icy roads make for hazardous road travel

BOSTON (AP)—A major winter storm bringing heavy snow and freezing rain to some communities spread across New England on Sunday, sending residents scurrying for their shovels and snowblowers to clear sidewalks and driveways.

Winter storm warnings and watches were in effect throughout the Northeast, and icy roads made for hazardous travel as far south as North Carolina.

The Northeast snow came as a Sierra Nevada storm packing heavy snow shut down a stretch of interstate Saturday and briefly knocked out power to tens of thousands in Reno, Nevada.

More than 11,000 electric customers in California were without power Sunday afternoon.

Some communities in Massachusetts had recorded more than a foot (30 centimeters) of snow by Sunday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service. Nearly 13,000 electric customers in the state were without power Sunday afteroon.

Hundreds of flights at Logan International Airport were delayed or canceled Sunday according to tracking website FlightAware.

Snow totals were lower for coastal communities, with Boston reporting just a few inches (centimeters). Snow was expected to continue throughout the day.

In Cambridge, where snowfall was lighter, residents quickly ventured out.

"I think it's funny because everyone's been freaking out about it," said Alison Conley, 26, a consultant. "We've been betting as to how much snow we're actually going to have and it's looking like not that much is going to stick."

Conley, who was out walking her dog Sunny, said the possibility that climate change is contributing to relatively warmer winter days in the region—the temperature in Boston is expected to be in the 50s on Wednesday, melting much of the snow—is a concern.

"I think it's super alarming," she said. "It is very weird, but, I don't know, from a selfish side it's like kind of nice to not have snow."

The storm reached into Maine with snow totals of up to 12 inches (30 centimeters) in some places—with locally higher amounts over southern New Hampshire and southwestern Maine. Wind gusts up 35 mph (56 kph) could add to blowing and drifting snow. Moderate to heavy snow was expected to continue in Vermont, with total snow accumulations of 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters)

Major winter storm conditions were expected into Sunday evening, including snow in parts of New England and rain and freezing rain around the central Appalachian mountains.

New York City mainly saw rain, but counties to the north and west recorded double-digit snow totals by Sunday morning. Millbrook in Dutchess County, about 75 miles (120 kilometers) north of New York, recorded a foot of snow. Port Jervis in Orange County reported 13 inches (33 centimeters).

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said Saturday that she expected two-thirds of her state to get 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow or more, "fortunately missing some of our more populated areas downstate, the Long Island and New York City."

Pentagon adds new details about Austin's secretive hospital stay

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Pentagon released new details Sunday about Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's continued hospitalization, saying he had a medical procedure Dec. 22, went home a day later and was admitted to intensive care Jan. 1 when he began experiencing severe pain.

The latest information came as members of both parties in Congress expressed sharp concerns about the secrecy of Austin's hospital stay and the fact that the president and other senior leaders were kept in the dark about it for days.

The statement, released by Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, did not, however, provide any details about the medical procedure or what actually happened on Monday to require Austin to be in intensive care at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Ryan said Austin was placed in the hospital's intensive care unit "due to his medical needs, but then remained in that location in part due to hospital space considerations and privacy."

The Pentagon's failure to disclose Austin's hospitalization, including to President Joe Biden, the National Security Council and top Pentagon leaders, for days reflects a stunning lack of transparency about his illness, how serious it was and when he may be released. Such secrecy, when the United States is juggling myriad national security crises, runs counter to normal practice with the president and other senior U.S. officials and Cabinet members.

Ryder said the National Security Council and Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks were not notified until Thursday, Jan. 4, that Austin had been hospitalized since Jan. 1. Ryder said Austin's chief of staff, Kelly Magsamen, was ill and "unable to make notifications before then." He said she informed Hicks and the national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, on Thursday.

Once notified, Hicks began preparing statements to send to Congress and made plans to return to Washington. Hicks was in Puerto Rico on leave but had communications equipment with her to remain in contact and had already been tasked with some secretary-level duties on Tuesday.

Asia

China calls for peaceful coexistence with the US

BEIJING (AP)—Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Friday that the United States and China must insist on peaceful coexistence and transcend their differences like they did when they established diplomatic relations 45 years ago this week.

» Promises pandas on 45th anniversary of US-China ties

Wang also promised that giant pandas would return to the U.S.—and specifically California—by the end of the year.

"China-U.S. cooperation is no longer a dispensable option for the two countries or even for the world, but a must-answer question that must be seriously addressed," he said.

Wang struck a relatively positive note at a lavish banquet marking the anniversary with 300 guests at a hall in the sprawling Diaoyutai state guest house complex in the Chinese capital.

The two countries are trying to navigate—and avoid a war—in what may be their most difficult waters since the U.S. ended official ties with Taiwan and recognized the communist government in Beijing as the government of China on Jan. 1, 1979.

China's rise as an economic and military power is challenging long-standing American leadership in the Asia region and globally.

"The world is currently undergoing profound changes unseen in a century," Wang said. "We must think about how to calibrate the direction of the large ship of China-U.S. relations (and) avoid hidden reefs and dangerous shoals."

Both Wang and David Meale, the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy, cited congratulatory letters exchanged by Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday's anniversary.

Meale, who spoke after Wang, said Biden expressed his commitment to managing the relationship responsibly and said he looked forward to building on the progress made by past leaders of the two countries.

Wang did criticize the use of "the big stick of sanctions" and engaging in power games, charges that China often levels at the United States. He denied that China seeks to supplant any other country and called on the U.S. to respect China's development path and core interests.

The giant pandas in Memphis, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., returned to China last year, and some feared that China would stop lending pandas to American zoos because of the tensions between the two countries.

But Xi raised hope for California in November when he told an audience in San Francisco that China was ready to continue cooperating with the U.S. on pandas and "do our best to meet the wishes of the Californians."

Wang told Friday's banquet audience that "preparations are ready for a giant panda return to California within the year."

ASIAN BRIEFS

N. Korea again fires near the sea border with South, as its leader's sister mocks Seoul

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea again fired artillery shells near its tense sea boundary with the South on Sunday, as the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un mocked the South's ability to detect its weapons launches. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff dismissed Kim Yo Jong's statement as "a comedy-like, vulgar propaganda" meant to undermine the South Korean people's trust in the military and stoke divisions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired more than more than 90 rounds near the rivals' disputed western sea boundary on Sunday afternoon. It said South Korea strongly urged North Korea to stop provocative acts immediately. North Korea's military later confirmed it used coastal artillery systems to carry out live-firing exercises. It said the drills were part of its military training schedules and the direction of its shells fired didn't expose any threat to South Korea. On Friday, North Korea launched about 200 shells. South Korea also claimed that the North fired more than 60 rounds on Saturday, but its rival has denied that. Kim Yo Jong said that North Korea on Saturday only detonated blasting powder simulating the sound of its coastal artillery on the seashore, to test the South Korean military's detection capabilities. "The result was clear as we expected. They misjudged the blasting sound as the sound of gunfire and conjectured it as a provocation. And they even made a false and impudent statement that the shells dropped north" of the sea boundary, Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. "I cannot but say that (South Korean) people are very pitiful as they entrust security to such blind persons and offer huge taxes to them," she said. "It is better 10 times to entrust security to a dog with a developed sense of hearing and smell." "I cannot but say that (South Korean) people are very pitiful as they entrust security to such blind persons and offer huge taxes to them," she said. "It is better 10 times to entrust security to a dog with a developed sense of hearing and smell."

Islamic State group claims responsibility for a minibus explosion

ISLAMABAD (AP)—The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a minibus explosion in the Afghan capital late Saturday that killed at least five people. The Sunni militant group said its members detonated an explosive device on the bus carrying Shiite Muslims, whom they called disbelievers, in a statement released shortly after the explosion Saturday. It was the first attack in the country in 2024. Fifteen other people were wounded in the attack in Kabul's western Shiite neighborhood of Dashti Barchi, according to police spokesperson Khalid Zadran, raising the toll on Sunday from an earlier figure of two killed and 14 wounded. The Dashti Barchi area of Kabul has been repeatedly targeted by the Islamic State group's affiliate in Afghanistan. The group has carried out major assaults on schools, hospitals and mosques, and has also attacked other Shiite areas across the country. The United Nations Assistance mission in Afghanistan in a statement on X called for an end to targeted attacks on civilians and "greater protection for Afghanistan's Hazara community and accountability for perpetrators." UNAMA gave a slightly higher figure for casualties, saying that at least 25 members of Kabul's Hazara community were killed or wounded, but without giving a breakdown. In November, in the same area of Kabul, IS claimed responsibility for a minibus explosion in which seven people were killed and 20 others were wounded. On Oct. 26, four people were killed and seven were wounded when an explosion hit a sports club in the same neighborhood. IS also claimed responsibility for that attack. Taliban Defense Minister Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid said on Dec. 31 that there was a 90% decrease in attacks by the IS affiliate in the past year.

World

TO KEEP GAZA WAR FROM SPEADING

Blinken meets Jordanian, Qatari leaders

AP

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, shakes hands with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, during Blinken's week-long trip aimed at calming tensions across the Middle East, at Lusail Palace in Lusail, Qatar, Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024.

DOHA, Qatar (AP)—On another urgent diplomatic mission to the Middle East, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Sunday with Arab partners to press for their help in tamping down resurgent fears that Israel's three-month war against Hamas in Gaza could spread.

In discussions with Qatar's emir and Jordan's king, Blinken spoke of the need for Israel to adjust its military operations to reduce civilian casualties and significantly boost the amount of humanitarian aid reaching Gaza, while stressing the importance of preparing detailed plans for the post-conflict future of the Palestinian territory, which has been decimated by Israeli bombardments.

The mission—that will also take him to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the West Bank and Egypt before he returns to Washington—is Blinken's fourth to the region since the war began.

After a day of talks with Turkish and Greek leaders in Istanbul and Crete, Blinken met with Jordan's King Abdullah II and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi in Amman before traveling to Doha for talks with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani to seek buy-in for U.S. efforts to tamp down resurgent fears that the war could engulf the region, ramp up aid to Gaza and prepare for an eventual end of hostilities.

"This is a conflict that could easily metastasize, causing even more insecurity and even more suffering," Blinken told reporters during a joint news conference with Sheikh Mohammed. "So from day one, among other priorities, we have been intensely focused on working to prevent the conflict from spreading."

Blinken said it is has been a major focus of his discussion with all of the leaders he has met with in recent days. "We share a commitment to ensure that the conflict does not expand," he said.

He said they also have discussed what each country can do once the conflict is over "to provide the assurances and the incentives required to build a more secure and more stable, more peaceful future for the region."

A year after pro-Bolsonaro riots and dozens of arrests, Brazil still recovering

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP)—Brazil's Congress has everything ready to open an exhibit Monday featuring pieces including a tapestry crafted by renowned artist Burle Marx and a replica of the country's constitution dated 1988.

The display is notable not because of the rarity of the objects, but because they are the living memory of one of the grimmest episodes in Brazil's recent history: As unprecedented riots in support of former President Jair Bolsonaro took place on Jan. 8, 2023, in government buildings in the capital Brasilia, the tapestry was damaged and the replica constitution was taken.

Many saw the rioting as part of a failed attempt by Bolsonaro to remain in power following his election loss. A year and hundreds of arrests later, Brazil is still recovering.

"Brazil's society still doesn't know how to handle what happened, there's no consensus," said Creomar de Souza, founder of political risk consultancy Dharma Politics. "Brazil's society is now in extreme opposites. And parts of those opposites are in a place that they cannot reconcile with the other."

Mimicking the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection by defenders of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump at the Capitol in Washington, thousands of Bolsonaro's supporters stormed the presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court buildings, in one of the biggest challenges to Latin America's most populous democracy.

A year later, around 400 people out of about 1,500 remain jailed facing charges for the riots and Bolsonaro has been under investigation by the Supreme Court over his role in the mayhem. But the country is still reeling from an episode that some say they are proud of.

Members of the three branches of power in Brazil say democracy and its guardrails have been restored after the trashing of the government buildings. But arrests have led supporters of the former president to say their freedom of speech is being violated and claim they are politically persecuted.

Overdrive

The 2024 Lexus RC 350: a classic grand touring coupe

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service

LEXUS NEWSROOM/TNS
The Lexus RC and RC F see minor changes for the 2024 model year. The 2024 RC adds Cloudburst Gray as an exterior color option, and 19-inch Enkei wheels are available for F SPORT models. Ultra White, Cloudburst Gray, and Caviar are also now available as exterior colors for the 2024 RC F Track Edition.

Well, isn't this the throwback?

It's not often that you get into a new car, let alone a sports coupe, and are confronted with a Compact Disc player. I admire Toyota's willingness to still offer a car with one, and my guess is that many Lexus buyers still own a stack of CDs. I once did, and digitized them all, a job that took some time, given that I had hundreds. But do I miss having a CD player? No more than I miss radio stations, with their idiotic verbose morning drive DJs interrupted by endless streams of commercials and an occasional song here or there.

But I do miss cars like 2024 Lexus RC 350 F-Sport, a gorgeously built, reasonably priced grand touring luxury sports coupe. Such cars are increasingly rare, with its only competition being the BMW 4 Series and Audi A5.

LEXUS NEWSROOM/TNS
The Lexus RC and RC F see minor changes for the 2024 model year. The 2024 RC adds Cloudburst Gray as an exterior color option, and 19-inch Enkei wheels are available for F SPORT models. Ultra White, Cloudburst Gray, and Caviar are also now available as exterior colors for the 2024 RC F Track Edition.

Despite wearing a nine-year-old design, it remains fresh, aggressive and classic in appearance. Actually, classic best describes the interior, which boasts an 8-inch or optional 10.3-inch infotainment touchscreen display. The controls seem dated, but let's consider them classic. Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, Amazon Alexa are standard; a Wi-Fi hotspot is optional, as is a 17-speaker Mark Levinson audio system.

The front seats are comfortable and supportive, while rear seats are afterthoughts; consider them a place to punish someone you loathe or as a padded parcel shelf. They're covered in ridiculously indulgent leather, and fit and finish is first rate. There're the expected luxuries, such as dual climate control, and a cabin that's seriously silent at speed. That is, except for your ABBA's greatest hits CD that you have cranked to 11.

If there is some noise at speed, it comes courtesy of the engine you're most likely to find at dealers: a 3.5-liter V-6 that produces 311-horsepower and 280 pound-feet of torque. A turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine is standard is on the rear-wheel-drive RC 300, generating a respectable 241 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque. Regardless of which engine you choose, rear-wheel-drive models get an eight-speed transmission; all-wheel drive models make do with a six-speed automatic.

NUTS & BOLTS

- **Base price**: $52,320
- **Engine**: 3.5-liter V6
- **Horsepower/Torque**: 311/280 pound-feet
- **EPA fuel economy (city/highway)**: 16/24 mpg
- **Fuel required**: 91 Octane
- **Length/Width/Height**: 184/72.4/54.9 inches
- **Ground clearance**: 5.1 inches
- **Cargo capacity**: 10.4 cubic feet
- **Payload**: 1,080 pounds
- **Towing capacity**: Not rated

The turbo four comes only with rear-wheel drive on the RC 300; other models get the V-6, which feels much more appropriate given this car's mission. There's also a naturally aspirated 5.0-liter V-8 producing 472 horsepower on the RC F, which reduces 0-60 mph times to 4.2 seconds from 6 seconds.

The test vehicle, a 2024 Lexus RC 350 F-Sport, proved to be the consummate Lexus. It's not the fastest in its segment, nor does have the sharp, hard-edged performance you'd expect of a sports coupe. This is, as stated, a grand tourer. It's a car that's as interested in comfort as it is in speed. There's a refinement to its nature that's not always present in its competitors. This is a gentleman's car, not a boy racer's.

Prices start at $45,920, including destination charge for the RC 300. The 2024 Lexus RC 350 F-Sport test vehicle started at a little over $52,000 for a luxury-laden bubble. It proves to be a comfortably accommodating coupe with which to make an escape in classic Lexus luxury.

Yet it's a rare gem that's soon to be replaced.

"We understand the importance of performance and having a performance halo for the brand," Vinay Shahani, vice president of Lexus marketing, told me in October 2023. "We have the LC 500 and we have the RC. Those are both vehicles that I think are uniquely tuned and kind of aimed toward the enthusiast. But we understand that there's probably the need to even be more aggressive in that in that arena. So stay tuned for more."

As ABBA might sing, thank you for the music, Lexus RC.

Getting the lead out

Q: Thought I'd comment on the item where you responded to a question about motor oil specs for an old vehicle, and using modern oils in older vehicles. Your answer was absolutely correct. But it is possible that the letter writer (or his/her sources) confused oil additives with the phasing out of lead in gasoline, and the resulting concern about wear/deposits on the valve seats? Modern materials and gas additives solved this issue, and it should be a non-issue for a vehicle driven as infrequently as the writer's but some still see it as a concern.

A.S., Littleton, Massachusetts

A: Good point. Leaded gasoline (containing tetraethyl lead) created a buildup on the valve seats, which cushioned the valves when they closed preventing valve recession. There was wailing and gnashing of teeth from collectible car owners when lead was initially phased out to prevent catalytic converter damage. Another compound, ZDDP, which helped reduce friction with motor oil, was also removed resulting in damage to collector car engines with flat-tappet camshafts and lifters. Things have quieted down, probably because, as you noted, those vintage cars are usually neither driven hard nor for great distances. Many are trailer queens.

■■■

Q: I own a 2002 Dodge Grand Caravan. It runs great but I have a problem with the seat belt. I cannot adjust it so it is comfortable. It rubs under my chin and can't be lowered anymore. I've tried every setting, all the way up and down. I wear it all the time, no matter how uncomfortable it is. Any suggestions for making it comfortable?

DREAMSTIME/TNS
Leaded gasoline (containing tetraethyl lead) created a buildup on the valve seats, which cushioned the valves when they closed preventing valve recession. There was wailing and gnashing of teeth from collectible car owners when lead was initially phased out to prevent catalytic converter damage.

C.P., Inverness, Illinois

A: I have the same problem in the summer when wearing a T-shirt. I have tried a clip that connects the shoulder belt to the seat belt, thus moving the shoulder belt to the left a little. Not so great and comes apart too often. I tried a fuzzy tube-shaped item that was acceptable but bulky. My latest is a satin-like padded square that wraps around the shoulder belt and then closes with Velcro. So far, the winner.

■■■

Q: On the tire-pressure topic, this is another car-bicycle crossover issue. Many people mistake the max pressure for recommended pressure. Your answer was spot on—it's best to follow the car manufacturer's recommendation (assuming the tires/rims are still OEM sized). Many cyclists ride with too much pressure, making their ride less safe and less comfortable. Thankfully the garage where I have my cars and tires maintained knows this and they go by the placard on the car.

L.W., South Windsor, Connecticut

A: Thanks for backing me up.

MOTORMOUTH

BY BOB WEBER
Tribune News Service

Bob Weber is a writer and mechanic who became an ASE-certified Master Automobile Technician in 1976. Weber's work has appeared in professional trade magazines and various consumer publications including Consumer Guide *and* Consumers Digest. *Send questions along with name and town to motormouth.tribune@gmail.com.*

Life & Style

‘Oppenheimer’ dominates Golden Globes, ‘Poor Things’ upsets ‘Barbie’ in comedy

By JAKE COYLE
AP FILM WRITER

JORDAN STRAUSS/INVISION/AP

Taylor Swift arrives at the 81st Golden Globe Awards on Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024, at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster biopic “Oppenheimer” dominated the 81st Golden Globes, winning five awards including best drama, while Yorgos Lanthimos’ Frankenstein riff “Poor Things” pulled off an upset victor over “Barbie” to triumph in the best comedy or musical category.

If awards season has been building toward a second match-up of Barbenheimer, this round went to “Oppenheimer.” The film also won best director for Nolan, best drama actor for Cillian Murphy, best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr. and for Ludwig Göransson’s score.

“I don’t think it was a no-brainer by any stretch of the imagination to make a three-hour talky movie—R-rated by the way—about one of the darkest developments in our history,” said producer Emma Thomas accepting the night’s final award and thanking Universal chief Donna Langley.

Along with best comedy or musical, “Poor Things” also won for Emma Stone’s performance as Bella, a Victorian-era woman experiencing a surreal sexual awakening.

“I see this as a rom-com,” said Stone. “But in the sense that Bella falls in love with life itself, rather than a person. She accepts the good and the bad in equal measure, and that really made me look at life differently.”

Lily Gladstone won best actress in a dramatic film for Martin Scorsese’s “Killers of the Flower Moon.” Gladstone, who began her speech speaking the language of her native tribe, Blackfeet Nation, is the first Indigenous winner in the category.

“This is a historic win,” said Gladstone. “It doesn’t just belong to me.”

The Globes were in their ninth decade but facing a new and uncertain chapter. After a tumultuous few years of scandal, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association was dissolved, leaving a new Globes, on a new network (CBS), to try to regain its perch as the third biggest award show of the year, after the Oscars and Grammys. Even the menu (sushi from Nobu) was remade.

“Golden Globes journalists, thank you for changing your game, therefore changing your name,” said Downey in his acceptance speech.

It got off to a rocky start. Host Jo Koy took the stage at the Beverly Hilton International Ballroom in Beverly Hills, California . The Filipino American stand-up hit on some expected topics: Ozempic, Meryl Streep’s knack for winning awards and the long-running “Oppenheimer.” (“I needed another hour.”)

After one joke flubbed, Koy, who was named host after some bigger names reportedly passed, also noted how fast he was thrust into the job.

“Yo, I got the gig 10 days ago. You want a perfect monologue?” said Koy. “I wrote some of these and they’re the ones you’re laughing at.”

HI, BARBIE

Downey’s win, his third Globe, denied one to “Kenergy.” Ryan Gosling had been seen as his stiffest competition, just one of the many head-to-head contests between “Oppenheimer” and Greta Gerwig’s “Barbie.” The filmmakers faced each other in the best director category, where Nolan triumphed.

It was two hours before “Barbie,” the year’s biggest hit with more than $1.4 billion in ticket sales, won an award Sunday. Billie Eilish’s “What Was I Made For?” took best song, and swiftly after, “Barbie” took the Globes’ new honor for “cinematic and box office achievement.” Some thought that award might go to Taylor Swift, whose “Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour” also set box-office records. Swift, though, remains winless in five Globe nods.

Margot Robbie, star and producer of “Barbie,” accepted the award in a pink gown modeled after 1977’s Superstar Barbie.

“We’d like to dedicate this to every single person on the planet who dressed up and went to the greatest place on Earth: the movie theaters,” said Robbie.

“Barbie” and “Oppenheimer,” two blockbusters brought together by a common release date, also faced off in the best screenplay category. But in an upset, Justine Triet and Arthur Harari won for the script to the French courtroom drama “Anatomy of a Fall.” Later, Triet’s film picked up best international film, too.

Though the Globes have no direct correlation with the Academy Awards, they can boost campaigns at a crucial juncture. Oscar nomination voting starts Thursday, and the twin sensations of Barbenheimer remain frontrunners.

Other contenders loom, though, like “Poor Things” and “The Holdovers.”

Paul Giamatti and Da’Vine Joy Randolph both won for Alexander Payne’s “The Holdovers.” Giamatti, reuniting with Payne two decades after “Sideways,” won best actor and Randolph won for her supporting performance as a grieving woman in the 1970s-set boarding school drama.

“Oh, Mary you have changed my life,” Randolph said of her character. “You have made me feel seen in so many ways that I have never imagined.”

Hayao Miyazaki’s “The Boy and the Heron” won best animated film, an upset over “Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse.”

‘SUCCESSION’ AND ‘THE BEAR’ LEAD TV WINNERS

The final season of “Succession” cleaned up on the television side. It won best drama series for the third time, a mark that ties a record set by “Mad Men” and “The X-Files.” Three stars from the HBO series also won: Matt Macfadyen, Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin.

“It is bittersweet, but things like this make it rather sweeter,” said “Succession” creator Jesse Armstrong.

Hulu’s “The Bear” also came away with a trio of awards, including best comedy series. Jeremy Allen White won for the second time, but this time he had company. Ayo Edebiri won her first Globe for her leading performance in the Hulu show’s second season. She thanked the assistants of her agents and managers.

Brother chooses to cut off contact after mother’s death

DEAR ABBY: My brother, who I will call “Alan,” has cut me off. We each received 50% of our mother’s estate, as specified by her will. Our respective inheritances amounted to a considerable amount of money. Alan thinks I stole $8,000 from him. This is both untrue and impossible.

Alan spoke with the only remaining relative of our generation, our cousin “Jay,” who subsequently contacted me and told me Alan will never speak to me again. This is terribly painful.

Alan has been using medical marijuana to deal with back pain, and his habit has taken over his life. I believe it has distorted his mind. He’s also living with a woman I believe is his enabler.

I have my theories as to what is actually going on, but I have no proof to back up my suspicions. What would you advise in this situation? Is it redeemable? I miss the close relationship we once enjoyed, but I can’t compete with the drugs.

DISILLUSIONED IN OHIO

DEAR DISILLUSIONED: I find it peculiar that cousin Jay was the person who delivered that message to you, rather than Alan, which would have provided an opportunity to defend yourself. Have you actually tried to contact your brother and been rebuffed? If you have done so, and have really been accused of grand theft, consider defending your reputation with the help of an attorney and accept that your brother chooses to remain estranged from you.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I am a single man in good health. I’m intelligent, friendly, funny and have been told by more than one woman that I don’t look my age. But I do have one exasperating personality trait. I can’t tell whether a woman is just friendly or romantically interested in me. I have no clue. None.

I met a very attractive single woman, relatively close to my age, a couple years ago. Over time, she has seemingly become more enthusiastic about saying hello to me when I visit her workplace to deliver items every week. She always smiles when we speak to each other. Conversations have gone from short and clipped to longer and more personal. I like her very much.

How can I tell if a mature woman is flirting with me or just being personable? She often works small compliments about me into our conversations. I want to ask her straight out if she is flirting, but if she says no, I’d be very embarrassed. I need your good advice.

CLUELESS IN MICHIGAN

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

DEAR CLUELESS: If the woman didn’t like you, she would keep those conversations short and strictly business. Do not ask her if she is flirting. DO ask if she’d like to have lunch sometime because your conversations are always too short. If she says yes, you will know your interest in her is reciprocated.

■ ■ ■

To receive a collection of Abby’s most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

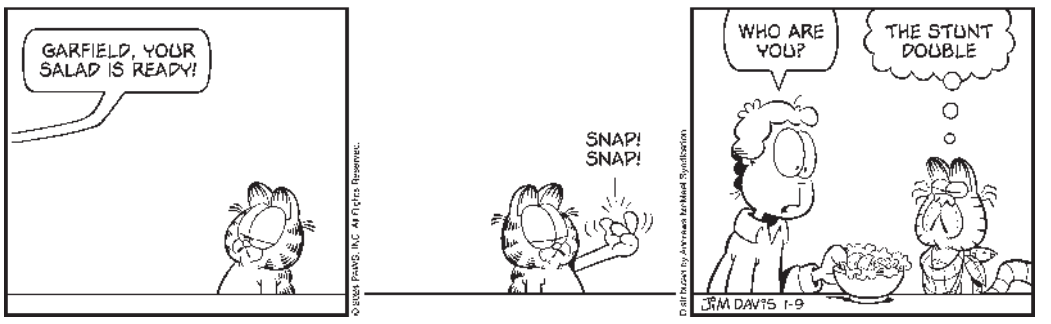
Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

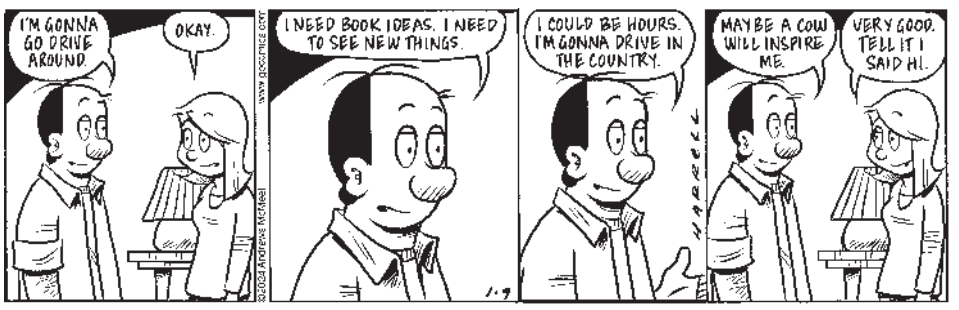
Garfield®

By Jim Davis



Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


I'M GONNA GO DRIVE AROUND.
OKAY.
I NEED BOOK IDEAS. I NEED TO SEE NEW THINGS.
I COULD BE HOURS. I'M GONNA DRIVE IN THE COUNTRY.
MAYBE A COW WILL INSPIRE ME.
VERY GOOD. TELL IT I SAID HI.

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

YOU SHOULD KNOW, I'M NOT ONE OF THOSE CONSPIRACY NUTS WHO BELIEVES STUFF LIKE THE EARTH IS FLAT.
WELL, I HOPE NOT.
OF COURSE. OTHERWISE, THE PRINTS FOUND OF BIGFOOT WOULDN'T SHOW SUCH A PRONOUNCED ARCH.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Skip
5 Crow's cry
8 Antelope's playmate
12 Queen of Carthage
13 MLB stat
14 Sailor's saint
15 More formal
17 Crooner Perry
18 Bro or sis
19 Ohm, for one
21 Sped
24 "Hi, sailor!"
25 Love god
26 More elegant
30 Id counterpart
31 Planet's path
32 Sault — Marie
33 More down-to-earth
35 Michael of "The Martian"
36 Villa d'—
37 Gather wool
38 City of India
41 24 horas
42 Operatic solo
43 More awkward
48 Branch
49 Bond rating
50 Wry Bombeck
51 Egyptian deity
52 Online guffaw
53 Fill up

DOWN

1 Quirky
2 Soviet space station
3 Chemical suffix
4 Coin flips
5 Early bed
6 Rushmore prez
7 Terrier type
8 Fake drakes
9 Carolina college
10 TV trophy
11 Leeway
16 "Ice Age" sloth
20 Blog entry
21 Coral formation
22 Jason's ship
23 "Neato!"
24 "Tiny Alice" playwright
26 All-important
27 "Got it"
28 Sicilian spouter
29 Bring up
31 Greek mountain
34 Skewered entrees
35 Stages
37 — card (cell phone insert)
38 Niger's neighbor
39 "Exodus" author
40 "La Boheme" role
41 Two-way
44 Asian language
45 401(k) alternative
46 911 responder
47 "The Lovebirds" star Issa

Solution time: 22 mins.

E	I	N		G	I	R	L	S		F	E	E
L	O	V		E	N	N	U	I		O	L	D
F	U	N	N	Y	F	A	C	E		R	A	D
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S	O	F	I	E	R		S	E	L	F		
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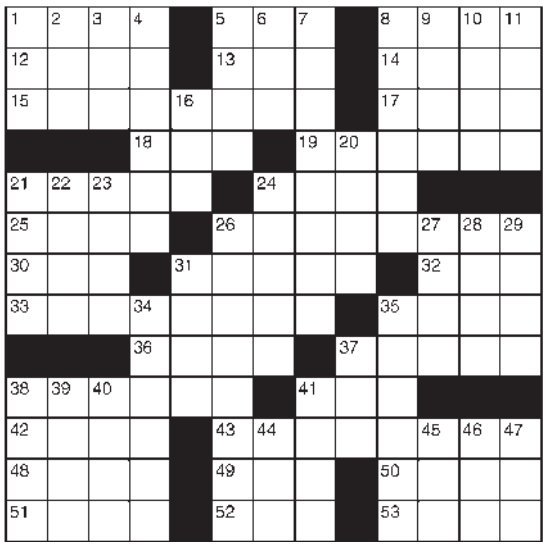
Yesterday's answer 1-9



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Nina Dobrev, 35; Catherine, Princess of Wales, 42; Dave Matthews, 57; Jimmy Page, 80.

Happy Birthday: Leave no room for error. Be direct, ask questions and figure out your best way forward before you make a move. Time is on your side, so don't feel pressured. Hard work, decisive action and putting your energy where it will do some good will lift your spirits and increase your profile. Monitor relationships with friends, relatives and business associates to avoid being led astray or taking on too much. Your numbers are 3, 12, 18, 25, 33, 37, 41.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Learn how to manage money better. Don't buy into a gimmick that promises the impossible. Look for a way to improve your income, secure your position and boost your confidence. Don't get angry; get moving in a positive direction. Be the master of your domain. ✪✪✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Embrace change and explore new possibilities. An opportunity to use your skills differently will offer insight into pursuits that encourage marketability, clout and exciting prospects. Consider taking courses or expanding your skills to meet demands, and you will find your niche. ✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Backing the wrong person will put you in a vulnerable position. Refrain from giving anyone control or the right to influence what you do next. Think for yourself and stand up for what's right. Question motives and make decisions based on facts, not emotions. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Get moving, research, try something new, and expand your mind, skills and connections. Listen, but don't buy into someone else's dream when you have goals to pursue. A change regarding a partnership will turn out better than anticipated. Do things your way. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Do things that please you. Surround yourself with people who enlighten you, but don't buy into or pay for someone pressuring you for a financial contribution. Too much of anything will drag you down. Concentrate on personal improvement and meaningful relationships. Romance is favored. ✪✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Say little, do a lot. Bring about positive change and participate in events and activities that stretch your imagination. What you learn will encourage new beginnings with people striving for stability and a passage forward. It's time to diversify how you use your skills. ✪✪✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Choose your battles wisely. Only enter the ring if your facts are straight and your intentions are honorable. Don't expect to keep the peace or please everyone; with debate comes change. Prepare for the consequences and move forward swiftly. ✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Pick up the pace and make things happen. A change will offer a unique perspective regarding possibilities. Surround yourself with hardworking individuals who share your values. Take a leadership position and march toward your goal. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Confiding in others will result in disappointment. Refuse to let your ego lead the way. Your intent to be and do your best will far exceed trying to prove yourself to others. Let your actions and the results you get be your calling card. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Take charge and make things happen. Choose positive changes that make life easier and your home comfortable. Don't share secrets, gossip or get involved in events or activities that might jeopardize your reputation, emotional well-being or health. Monitor your financial transactions with care. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Pay attention to detail and keep tabs on what everyone around you is doing. Don't take on too much or put yourself in a negative position due to someone else's stubbornness. If you make decisions that offer a positive outcome, you'll avoid mistakes. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Pay attention to investments and debt. Keeping your finances in order will relieve stress and give you more options when an opportunity presents itself. Connect with people who have always been in your corner. ✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are sensitive, responsive and goal-oriented. You are prompt and focused.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

1		9				7		
		7	1		5			
8	6		7			5	1	
		8		5		4		1
4	9	5	3	1	6	2	8	7
			4		8			5
		2		7	3	1		
	3			4	1	9		
5					9		7	8

Difficulty: ★★ 1/9

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

4	9	2	5	8	1	6	7	3
1	7	6	3	4	9	5	2	8
3	5	8	7	6	2	9	1	4
2	8	3	1	9	5	7	4	6
9	1	7	6	2	4	3	8	5
6	4	5	8	7	3	1	9	2
8	3	1	2	5	7	4	6	9
7	2	9	4	3	6	8	5	1
5	6	4	9	1	8	2	3	7

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Difficulty: ★ 1/8

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

INFINITY POOLS **Solution: 8 letters**

A	E	E	N	D	L	E	S	S	L	E	G	R	E	M
E	L	V	V	A	C	U	U	M	E	R	E	T	A	W
P	N	K	A	N	O	R	E	Z	T	W	T	O	O	S
L	E	I	A	P	E	N	I	M	O	R	B	L	U	D
U	P	L	R	L	O	T	V	L	H	E	F	O	A	E
M	A	S	U	O	I	R	U	X	U	L	U	R	S	S
B	C	C	T	N	L	N	A	L	I	N	I	N	G	I
I	S	A	A	R	I	H	I	T	I	L	Y	B	N	G
N	Y	S	L	K	U	F	C	T	E	E	R	R	I	N
G	T	C	S	C	I	C	N	P	Y	U	E	U	T	A
B	I	A	L	L	I	O	T	M	O	L	N	S	T	T
A	C	D	T	E	C	U	R	U	T	A	E	H	I	U
S	T	E	P	S	A	I	M	P	R	V	C	V	F	R
I	R	O	O	P	E	N	I	N	G	E	S	K	E	A
N	V	I	E	W	S	L	A	C	I	M	E	H	C	L

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Alkalinity, Balance, Basin, Bromine, Brush, Calcium, Cascade, Chemicals, Chlorine, Cityscape, Clean, Continuous, Design, Endless, Evaporate, Filter, Fittings, Flow, Heat, Hotel, Level, Lining, Lower, Luxurious, Merge, Natural, Opening, Plumbing, Pump, Salt, Sanitize, Scenery, Skin, Steps, Structure, Vacuum, Value, Views, Water, Weir, Zero

Yesterday's Answer: Tuna

To purchase THE COLLECTED WONDERWORD, Volumes 56 through 76, order on line at www.WonderWordBooks.com. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

Allen, Bills rally past Dolphins, win 4th straight AFC East title

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP)—Josh Allen threw a go-ahead touchdown pass to Dawson Knox midway through the fourth quarter, and the Buffalo Bills won their fourth straight AFC East title, rallying past the Miami Dolphins 21-14 on Sunday night.

Allen made things difficult for the Bills with three turnovers in Miami territory, but he came through at the end to help Buffalo earn the No. 2 seed in the conference. The Bills, who didn't clinch a playoff berth until Tennessee beat Jacksonville earlier Sunday, will host seventh-seeded Pittsburgh in the wild-card round on Sunday.

Buffalo closed the season by winning five straight and six of seven.

Miami fell to the sixth seed and will play at AFC West champion Kansas City on Saturday night.

The Bills trailed 14-7 before Deonte Harty returned a punt 96 yards for a touchdown early in the fourth quarter. After Allen's 5-yard TD toss to Knox, Miami had one last chance, but Taylor Rapp intercepted Tua Tagovailoa with 1:13 left.

Allen finished 30 of 38 for 359 yards and two TDs. He was intercepted twice and lost a fumble.

AP

Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen (17) waves to fans at the end of an NFL football game against the Miami Dolphins, Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024, in Miami Gardens, Fla.

TITANS 28, JAGUARS 20

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—Trevor Lawrence was stopped on a quarterback sneak on fourth-and-goal with 7:13 left, then threw incomplete on another fourth down with 1:47 remaining, and Jacksonville was eliminated from the playoffs by losing to Tennessee.

A win would have given the Jaguars (9-8) the AFC South title. Instead, Houston took the division crown and will host Cleveland in the playoffs next Saturday.

The Jaguars started the season 8-3 but lost five of their final six. Lawrence, who sat out last week with a sprained shoulder, was intercepted twice. The Jaguars also turned the ball over on downs three times — twice in the final 7:10.

Derrick Henry ran for a season-high 153 yards and a touchdown for the Titans (6-11), who had been eliminated from playoff contention earlier than at any prior point in coach Mike Vrabel's six-season tenure. Tennessee's three-game skid ended.

COWBOYS 38, COMMANDERS 10

LANDOVER, Md. (AP)—Dak Prescott threw two of his four touchdown passes to CeeDee Lamb, and Dallas beat Washington to win the NFC East title and secure the No. 2 seed in the conference.

The Cowboys finished 12-5 and reached the playoffs for the third straight time under coach Mike McCarthy. They will host Green Bay next Sunday in the wild-card round. Dallas went 8-0 at home this season.

Last-place Washington (4-13) tied a franchise record for most losses in a season in what's expected to be the final game for coach Ron Rivera. The Commanders will have the No. 2 overall pick in April's draft and might seek a replacement for quarterback Sam Howell, who was intercepted twice and led the NFL with 21 picks this season.

PACKERS 17, BEARS 9

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP)—Jordan Love threw for 316 yards and connected with Dontayvion Wicks for a pair of touchdowns, and Green Bay beat Chicago to secure the NFC's final playoff spot.

The Packers (9-8) won their third straight overall and beat the Bears (7-10) for a 10th consecutive time. Green Bay will play at NFC East champion Dallas in the wild-card round.

Love went 27 of 32 and Green Bay never punted. His 10-yard touchdown pass to Wicks put Green Bay ahead for good midway through the second quarter.

BUCCANEERS 9, PANTHERS 0

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)—Chase McLaughlin kicked three field goals and Tampa Bay beat Carolina to win its third consecutive NFC South title.

The Buccaneers (9-8) were facing an all-or-nothing scenario, with a win clinching their fourth straight playoff berth and a loss resulting in elimination. They will host Philadelphia on Monday night in the wild-card round of the playoffs.

Tampa Bay wasn't impressive on offense with Baker Mayfield held to 137 yards passing in his return to Carolina, but the defense did just enough.

The Bucs held the Panthers to 199 yards and 11 first downs, forced two turnovers and sacked rookie Bryce Young three times.

Young finished 11 of 18 for 94 yards and the Panthers had potential touchdowns overturned by a replay review and a penalty. Carolina (2-15) became the first team to be shut out in back-to-back games since the Cleveland Browns in 2008.

JETS 17, PATRIOTS 3

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP)—Breece Hall rushed for 178 yards and a late touchdown, and New York snapped a 15-game losing streak against Bill Belichick and New England.

With snow covering the field, Greg Zuerlein kicked three field goals to help the Jets (7-10) beat the Patriots for the first time since Dec. 27, 2015. It was the Jets' first win at New England since the 2010 AFC divisional playoff round.

The Patriots' 4-13 record is the worst in Belichick's 29-year NFL coaching career. Sunday's loss was the 178th of Belichick's career, including the playoffs, tying him with Tom Landry for the most ever. It also ties the record of 165 regular-season losses held by Jeff Fisher and Dan Reeves.

Belichick was set to meet with team owner Robert Kraft on Monday to discuss the coach's future.

LIONS 30, VIKINGS 20

DETROIT (AP)—Sam LaPorta had a 2-yard touchdown catch midway through the first quarter but later limped off the field with a knee injury, an ominous development for NFC North champion Detroit in its win over Minnesota.

Detroit (12-5) matched a franchise record for wins and will host a playoff game for the first time since the 1993 season when it played at the Pontiac Silverdome. LaPorta set an NFL record for receptions by a tight end with 86, but his availability for the playoffs is in question.

Detroit coach Dan Campbell opted to play all his starters even though the best the Lions could hope for was to improve their playoff seeding from No. 3 to No. 2 in the NFC. But Dallas' victory at Washington kept the Lions in the third spot. Detroit will host the Los Angeles Rams in the wild-card round next Sunday night.

Jared Goff threw for 320 yards and two touchdowns for the Lions.

Minnesota (7-10) was eliminated from playoff contention, losing four straight games and six of seven.

GIANTS 27, EAGLES 10

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP)—A.J. Brown suffered a knee injury and Jalen Hurts was ineffective for playoff-bound Philadelphia, which fell to New York and finished the season by losing five of six.

The Eagles (11-6) will play at Tampa Bay in the wild-card round.

Brown crumpled to the MetLife Stadium turf in the first quarter and grabbed his right knee. Hurts took a hard hit to the right middle finger on his throwing hand and went 7 of 16 for 55 yards and an interception before being replaced by Marcus Mariota.

SAINTS 48, FALCONS 17

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Derek Carr passed for four touchdowns to lift New Orleans past Atlanta.

The Saints (9-8) fell short of the NFC South title because Tampa Bay won at Carolina, and they were later eliminated from the playoffs when Green Bay beat Chicago.

Jamaal Williams had a 1-yard TD run in the final two minutes after New Orleans lined up as if planning to take a knee and run out the clock. The play appeared to upset both the Falcons and Saints coach Dennis Allen.

Atlanta finished 7-10 for the third straight season under coach Arthur Smith.

Carr passed for 264 yards and rookie receiver A.T. Perry caught two scoring passes to double his season total for New Orleans.

Desmond Ridder threw for 291 yards and two touchdowns but was intercepted and lost a fumble, with both turnovers leading to Saints touchdowns in the second half.

SEAHAWKS 21, CARDINALS 20

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP)—Geno Smith threw two touchdown passes and Seattle rallied past Arizona but missed the playoffs because Green Bay beat Chicago.

The Seahawks (9-8) fell short of the postseason for the second time in three seasons.

Arizona's Matt Prater missed a 51-yard field attempt wide right on the game's final play. It was his second missed kick of the fourth quarter.

Kyler Murray threw for 262 yards for the Cardinals (4-13), and his 8-yard touchdown pass to Trey McBride on a trick play put Arizona ahead 20-13 midway through the fourth quarter. The Cardinals lined up in field goal formation before Murray sprinted back under center.

RAMS 21, 49ERS 20

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP)—Carson Wentz threw two touchdown passes and ran for a score, and Los Angeles beat San Francisco in a game filled with backups.

Wentz scored on a 12-yard run with 4:56 to play and then converted a 2-point conversion pass to Tutu Atwell to give the Rams (10-7) a 21-20 lead.

Los Angeles held on from there and clinched the sixth seed in the NFC and a trip to Detroit in the wild-card round.

The 49ers (12-5) had already clinched the top seed in the NFC and a first-round bye, and the Rams secured a playoff spot last week.

San Francisco's Sam Darnold went 16 for 26 for 189 yards with a TD run and a TD pass to Ronnie Bell while starting in place of Brock Purdy.

BENGALS 31, BROWNS 14

CINCINNATI (AP)—Jake Browning threw three touchdown passes, Joe Mixon rushed for a season-high 111 yards and a score, and Cincinnati beat a Cleveland team resting most of its starters for the playoffs.

The Browns (11-6) were locked in as the No. 5 seed in the AFC and will play at AFC South champion Houston on Saturday. Quarterback Joe Flacco, star defensive end Myles Garrett, receiver Amari Cooper and cornerback Denzel Ward were among the Browns' starters who didn't play.

Cincinnati (9-8) finished above .500 for the third straight season, and the AFC North became the first division since the 1970 merger to have all its teams finish above .500. The Bengals finished 1-5 against divisional foes.

The Bengals led 24-0 at halftime. Browns quarterback Jeff Driskel—signed Dec. 29 from Arizona's practice squad—didn't fare well against Cincinnati's defensive regulars until the fourth quarter, when he threw two touchdown passes to David Bell.

CHIEFS 13, CHARGERS 12

INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP)— Mike Edwards returned a fumble 97 yards for a touchdown, Harrison Butker made a 41-yard field goal with 49 seconds remaining, and AFC West champion Kansas City beat Los Angeles while resting most of its starters.

With the Chiefs (11-6) locked into the AFC's No. 3 seed for the playoffs, Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce were inactive. Kelce finished with 984 receiving yards, ending the All-Pro tight end's bid for an eighth straight 1,000-yard season.

Kansas City will host Miami in the wild-card round on Saturday night.

The Chargers (5-12) closed the season with five straight losses, the last three after coach Brandon Staley and general manager Tom Telesco were fired on Dec. 15.

RAIDERS 27, BRONCOS 14

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Aidan O'Connell passed for 244 yards and two touchdowns, Zamir White rushed for 112 yards, and Las Vegas beat Denver.

It was the Raiders' eighth consecutive victory over their AFC West rivals and 10th in 11 games.

Both teams finished 8-9. Las Vegas went 5-4 under interim coach Antonio Pierce, and owner Mark Davis will now have to decide whether to keep him full-time.

LeBron, Lakers hold off Clippers to end 4-game losing streak

LOS ANGELES (AP)—LeBron James had 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, Taurean Prince hit a tie-breaking 3-pointer with 1:17 to play and the Los Angeles Lakers snapped a four-game losing streak with a 106-103 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday night.

Anthony Davis had 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Lakers, who beat the Clippers for the second straight time after losing 11 straight to their hallway rivals.

Norman Powell's 3-point attempt rattled in and out at the buzzer as the Lakers hung on to beat one of the NBA's hottest teams. The Lakers also won for only the fourth time in 14 games since winning the NBA's Inaugural In-Season Tournament.

Paul George scored 22 points and Ivica Zubac had 22 points and 19 rebounds for the Clippers, whose five-game winning streak ended. Kawhi Leonard scored 15 points, and James Harden had 15 points and nine assists in the childhood Lakers fan's first game against them since getting traded home to the Clippers, who have still won 14 of their last 17.

Neither team took a double-digit lead until Russell's third 3-pointers put the Lakers up 92-82 early in the fourth. The Clippers rallied with nine consecutive points down the stretch, and they tied it on Powell's three free throws with 2:19 to play while the Lakers went into a 2-for-7 slump with six turnovers.

But D'Angelo Russell found Prince for his big 3-pointer from the perimeter in one of his biggest shots since joining the Lakers. After Harden missed a jumper and James hit a clutch fadeaway, Harden kept it close with a 3-pointer with 23 seconds left.

AP

Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, front right, drives to the basket against Los Angeles Clippers forward Paul George (13) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles, Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024.

Prince hit two free throws, but Zubac scored a quick basket before Austin Reaves missed one of two free throws with 4.2 seconds left. Powell had a decent look, but couldn't tie it.

Russell scored 13 points with three 3-pointers in his return from a three-game absence with a bruised tailbone for the Lakers, who had been on a three-season skid against the Clippers until they broke through with an overtime victory early this season.

The game was a franchise milestone for the Clippers, who played their final game as the "visiting" team in their own arena, barring a playoff series between these clubs. The two Los Angeles teams' final two meetings of this regular season will be "home" games for the Clippers, whose fans are usually outnumbered by Lakers supporters no matter which team is nominally at home.

The Clippers and Lakers have shared the building long known at Staples Center since it opened in 1999, with the Clippers finally becoming worthy rivals over the past decade after years of struggle.

Billionaire Clippers owner Steve Ballmer's Intuit Dome will open in Inglewood next season, finally creating an exclusive home for the franchise that has labored in the shadow of the Lakers' championship banners for a quarter-century of cohabitation.

MAVERICKS 115, TIMBERWOLVES 108

DALLAS (AP)—Kyrie Irving made the tying and go-ahead 3-pointers, finishing with 35 points to lead Dallas over Minnesota.

Irving shot 14 of 27, including 6 of 8 from 3-point range. Luka Doncic added 34 points on 12-of-26 shooting, including 5 of 12 on 3s.

Irving's 3 tied it at 106 with 2:59 remaining. He then stole the ball from Rudy Gobert and made another 3 from the right corner with 2:05 to play.

Derrick Jones Jr. sealed the win with a driving dunk with 24 seconds to go.

Anthony Edwards topped West-leading Minnesota with 36 points on 14-of-27 shooting.

PELICANS 133, KINGS 100

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—CJ McCollum scored 30 points, making seven 3-pointers, and New Orleans led by 50 points in a rout of Sacramento.

Jonas Valanciunas added 15 points and 12 rebounds for the Pelicans, who have won six straight on the road and all four matchups this season against the Kings, including a quarterfinal victory in Sacramento in the In-Season Tournament. Brandon Ingram also scored 15 points.

Both teams, which are in the middle of the pack in the Western Conference playoff picture, entered the game having won four of five. The Pelicans had won four straight before losing by 16 to the Clippers at home on Friday.

Domantas Sabonis had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Kings, but star guard De'Aaron Fox scored just three points on 1-of-10 shooting.

RAPTORS 133, WARRIORS 118

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—RJ Barrett scored a season-high 37 points in his fourth game since being traded to hometown Toronto, leading the Raptors past Golden State.

Stephen Curry had an especially off night, finishing 2 for 14 with nine points and missing all nine of his 3-pointers in his second-lowest scoring total this season,

Barrett, acquired from the Knicks on Dec. 30, made 11 of his first 14 shots and wound up 13 for 20 from the floor with six rebounds and six assists.

Klay Thompson scored 25 points for Golden State. Draymond Green returned to the practice floor for the Warriors' pregame walkthrough a day after being reinstated by the NBA following a 12-game suspension.

NUGGETS 131, PISTONS 114

DENVER (AP)—Jamal Murray scored a season-high 37 points, Nikola Jokic had 16 assists and Denver handed Detroit its 18th straight road loss,

Jokic was more distributor and shot blocker than scorer, taking just three shots and finishing with four points. The two-time NBA MVP tied a career high with five blocked shots in between setting teammates up for easy buckets around the rim.

Jalen Duren led Detroit with 20 points. The Pistons fell to 1-19 away from home, with their lone road win Oct. 27 at Charlotte.

The Pistons dropped their fourth straight game. This skid comes on the heels of ending their NBA record-tying 28-game losing streak against Toronto on Dec. 30.

TRAIL BLAZERS 134, NETS 127, OT

NEW YORK (AP)—Anfernee Simons had 38 points and 11 assists, Malcolm Brogdon scored eight of his 18 points during Portland's nearly flawless overtime against Brooklyn.

Jerami Grant added 27 points and Shaedon Sharpe chipped in 21 off the bench for the Trail Blazers. They snapped a four-game losing streak and won for the first time in eight road games.

Mikal Bridges scored 42 points and made the tying jumper with 1.5 seconds remaining in regulation. But Portland then shot 6 for 7 in overtime, with Brogdon hitting all three shots, including two 3-pointers.

The Nets have lost 11 of their last 14 games and play their next one in Paris on Thursday against Cleveland.

GRIZZLIES 121, SUNS 114

PHOENIX (AP)—Jaren Jackson Jr. had 28 points and 10 rebounds and Memphis, playing without Ja Morant, overcame an 11-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Phoenix.

Marcus Smart added 25 points and Desmond Bane had 23, including a go-ahead 3-pointer with 1:30 to play. Morant was sidelined because of soreness in his right shoulder.

Kevin Durant returned for Phoenix after missing three games because of soreness in his right hamstring. He had 23 points and 10 rebounds. Devin Booker led the Suns with 24 points.

MAGIC 117, HAWKS 110, OT

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—Paolo Banchero scored eight of his 35 points in overtime and Orlando beat Atlanta.

Caleb Houstan added a career-high 25 points in his first start of the season.

Trae Young had 31 points and nine assists for Atlanta. Dejounte Murray added 24 points and Bogdan Bogdanovic had 18 points.

Saddiq Bey's dunk with 18.8 seconds left in the fourth tied it for the Hawks, and Houstan missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer to send it to overtime.

CAVALIERS 117, SPURS 115

CLEVELAND (AP)—Jarrett Allen had 29 points and 16 rebounds, Caris LeVert added 23 points and Cleveland beat San Antonio for its third straight victory.

Victor Wembanyama had 24 points, 10 rebounds and five blocked for San Antonio.

Draymond Green back on the practice floor with Warriors after suspension

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Draymond Green returned to the practice floor Sunday with the Golden State Warriors, one day after being reinstated by the NBA following a 12-game suspension.

He was also on the bench as the Warriors hosted the Toronto Raptors, involved in the huddles during timeouts.

"It was great, we missed him dearly and we'll never be the same until he's in the lineup," Klay Thompson said after a 133-118 loss. "We are eager for his return on the court and he is obviously the backbone of this team and heart and soul, so I'm looking forward to just playing and be out there with Draymond again. He'll be a difference maker."

Coach Steve Kerr wasn't sure when Green might be ready to play in a game again after the prolonged time away working on himself in the wake of hitting Phoenix center Jusuf Nurkic in the face on Dec. 12.

"He's here, he looks good, he's excited to be here," Kerr said before the game. "We just had our walkthrough, so he took part in the walkthrough. Good to have him back."

For now, Green will begin his regular shooting routine again and work daily with vice president of player health and performance Rick Celebrini to determine his fitness and readiness for game action. That will include a ramp up of scrimmaging in a similar way the Warriors do with a player coming back from injury.

"We'll just see," said Kerr, who doesn't know how much Green might have played basketball during the absence. "I have no idea when that will be."

The emotional Warriors forward also had previously served a five-game suspension in November for putting a choke hold on Minnesota big man Rudy Gobert.

The league announced Saturday the end of Green's indefinite suspension, saying he "demonstrated his commitment to conforming his conduct to standards expected of NBA players" during the penalty that began Dec. 14. Green has met with a counselor as well as had multiple joint meetings with representatives of the league, the Warriors and the National Basketball Players Association.

The 33-year-old Green, a key member of four Warriors championships, was ejected for the 18th time in his career—most among active NBA players—during that 119-116 loss at Phoenix.

Kerr and the Warriors are hoping Green can come back and still be the fiery player that makes him so good but do so without crossing the line and going too far. He brought an energy and lift of the spirits just being back at Chase Center.

"For sure," Kerr said. "Everybody's excited to see him, it's great to have him back. He's one of our leaders and he's happy to be back, so it's a good vibe in there."

Analysis: Nadal's withdrawal leaves plenty of questions about his future

By HOWARD FENDRICH
AP TENNIS WRITER

AP

Rafael Nadal of Spain looks dejected between games in his quarter-final match against Jordan Thompson of Australia during the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane, Australia, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024.

The Rotary Club of Saipan will be holding the Inaugural RCS-End Polio Cycling Challenge, a bike race that aims to raise funds to support the Rotarians' world-wide "End Polio Now" campaign and to welcome Rotary International District 2750 governor Yoichiro Miyazaki to the island.

The bike race is set for Jan. 20 and coincides with the same week of Miyazaki's visit, as the Tokyo, Japan resident will be on Saipan from Jan. 19 to 21.

Miyazaki oversees District 2750's 98 Rotary clubs, including RCS, and close to 4,500 Rotarians.

An avid biker, Miyazaki uses his passion for this sport to raise awareness for "End Polio Now" initiative. Rotary clubs across the world have been raising funds for over 35 years to get rid of polio.

Being a founding partner of the "Global Polio Eradication Initiative," efforts by Rotarians were instrumental in helping government officials make policy decisions that led to contributions of over $10 billion to support the campaign. For the Inaugural RCS-End Polio Cycling Challenge, all proceeds will be donated for the cause.

The bike race will start and end at Banzai Cliff and features three courses—30K (long course), 20K (short), and 400m (for U12 bikers). The 30K course will have bikers heading to Saipan Select and Bird Island before returning to Banzai, while the 20K course's turnaround point is Saipan Select.

The shortest race—400m—will be within the vicinity of Banzai Cliff. Riders can choose from the following categories: E-bike, mountain bike, and road bike. There will be six age groups for the races, namely U12, U30, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, and 60-and-above. Entry fee is $15.

For winners selection, RCS will award the overall top finisher (men's and women's) in the 20K and 30K events. The Top 3 finishers (men's and women's) per category and age group will also be recognized, while each participant who will complete the race will receive finishers shirt. Check-in time is at 5:30am, while the race will kick off at 6:30am.

Raffle tickets will also be sold as additional support to the "End Polio Now" initiative. Raffle tickets will be three for $5 and prizes include a variety of gift certificates and a Samsung A7 tablet. Raffle tickets can be purchased from any member of the Interact, Rotaract or Rotary Club of Saipan.

Registration, on the other hand, can be done at Bike Pro, The Bike Shop, Latte Built, or MegaByte. Online registration is also available at www.webscorer.com/register?raceid=339057 with payments received on site or can be turned over upon race kit pick-up on Friday, Jan. 19, from 5pm to 7pm, at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan.

For more information on the bike race, raffle tickets or to donate, reach out to event chair Charles Cepeda at charlesvcepeda@gmail.com or call (670) 483-6435. ***(PR)***

Left-hander Martín Pérez, Pirates finalize $8M, 1-year contract

PITTSBURGH (AP)—Martín Pérez and the Pittsburgh Pirates finalized their $8 million, one-year contract on Friday.

The 32-year-old left-hander, who won the World Series with Texas in November, agreed to the deal in mid-December subject to a successful physical.

Right-hander Max Kranick was designated for assignment to open a roster spot.

Pérez went 10-4 for the Rangers last season with a 4.45 ERA in 35 games, 20 of them starts. He moved from the rotation to the bullpen in August and made three relief appearances in the playoffs—all in mop-up duty—as Texas won its first World Series title. His salary is less than half the $19.65 million he earned last year after accepting the Rangers' qualifying offer.

The Pirates are trying to build rotation depth in the minors but it remains a work in progress, one of the reasons they have looked outside the organization for help at the big league level.

Pérez is 85-81 with a 4.44 ERA in 12 major league seasons with Texas (2012-18, '22-23), Minnesota (2019) and Boston (2020-21). He was an All-Star in 2022, when he finished 12-8 with a career-best 2.89 ERA.

The arrival of Pérez and Marco Gonzales gives the Pirates a couple of experienced arms to pair with Mitch Keller, an All-Star for the first time in 2023. Other pitchers who could fit into the 2024 rotation are Quinn Priester, Roansy Contreras, Bailey Falter, Andre Jackson and Luis Ortiz, with 2023 top overall draft pick Paul Skenes likely getting a chance to see how ready he is during spring training.

JT Brubaker, Pittsburgh's opening-day starter in 2022, could also be back after recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Gonzales was traded to Atlanta by Seattle on Dec. 3, and the Mariners agreed to send the Braves $4.5 million next Aug. 1. That means Gonzales will in effect cost the Braves $4.75 million, the Mariners $4.5 million and the Pirates $2.75 million.

KAGES

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The Colts lost steam in the final quarter, while the Bue Marlins chugged strongly ahead and continued to bank their shots. Tinian's leading scorer Francisco Moses tried his best to even the game up once more, but Kagman's own top shooter Benaiah Murphy ensured that it was elusive.

Murphy went on to score 18 of the Blue Marlins' total points, while Conan Iakopo added 2, and Astrid Masiwemai scored a free throw.

Moses put up 12 markers, Manuel Cruz Jr. scored 2, and Audreanna Barcinas shot a free throw.

Third place was Koblerville Elementary School who lost to Tinian earlier in the morning.

Blue Marlins head coach, Constancio Miday said after the awards ceremony that their team's championship was an "impressive win."

"We've worked for this for three years because it's always Koblerville [Elementary School] that is dominating the sport. But now, it's our time. Our hard work with my students resulted in the championship and I feel good because they're happy," said the KagES basketball coach of four years. "I made sure that we played hard, and rain or shine we practiced. Now, we have the trophy. It's for them," he said.

He added, "Our schools need not only academics. We need to reinforce the physical wellness of the kids. When the kids are physically fit, academics will follow."

He said there are quite a few students in the team who are promoting to middle school next school year and the team would have to be rebuilt again for the next season.

Miday, a teacher of almost nine years, then said, "thank you to those teams who participated in this league and to the PSS Athletics Program."

The IT&E Interscholastic Co-ed Elementary School Basketball League 2023-2024 season was organized by the Public School System Athletic Program with help from the Northern Mariana Islands Basketball Federation.

LEIGH GASES

Kagman Elementary School's Benaiah Murphy, right, drives to the basket against a Tinian Elementary School defender during their championship game of the 2023-2024 IT&E Interscholastic Co-ed Elementary School Basketball League last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

KagES 20 – Murphy 18, Iakopo 2, Masiwemai 1.

TES 16 – F. Moses 12, Cruz Jr. 2, Barcinas 1.

Scoring by quarters: 4-5, 8-7, 13-11, 20-16.

DODGERS

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pulled away in the fourth. It was a 7-5 Pirates lead in the third, but they scored three more and made it 10-5.

In the fifth inning, the Pirates went on to score four more, while the Marlins were thrown out in order.

The Pirates leadoff batter Vinnie Sablan racked up two hits out of three at-bats, scored two runs, and had one RBI; Jerome Delos Santos also went 2-for-3, scored three runs, and hit a double; and Derek Sasamoto provided cover from the bottom of the line up going two hits for three at-bats, scoring two runs, and bringing in one RBI.

FMS

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shut them down.

FMS, however, were ball magnets of the good kind as they drove in 13 more runs throughout the game. Lizama went on to hit an RBI triple, while Abraham Saralu and Rogolofoi hit an RBI double each.

In other results, Mount Carmel School won over Tanapag Middle School, 16-11; Hopwood Middle School beat MCS, 15-5; Dandan Middle School trumped TMS, 13-8; and HMS JV blanked COVMS, 7-0.

In the standings as of last Saturday, HMS V and DMS lead the league with a 4-1 record each; TMS and MCS are at 3-2 apiece; COVMS have yet to win with five losses; while HMS JV is 1-4.

The last games of the regular season were played yesterday afternoon. The championship series is set to start on Jan. 11 to Jan. 13 at the Capital Hill Softball Field.

Allen, Bills rally past Dolphins, win 4th straight AFC East title.

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KagES swim to co-ed hoops title

LEIGH GASES

Champions Kagman High School, left in dark blue, and Tinian Elementary School, right, pose with their trophies during the awards ceremony of the 2023-2024 IT&E Interscholastic Co-ed Elementary School Basketball League last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Kagman Elementary School Blue Marlins swam to the 2023-2024 IT&E Interscholastic Co-ed Elementary School Basketball League title after they beat Tinian Elementary School Colts in a double-elimination championship last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

Before the championship series, the Blue Marlins were undefeated with five wins. They were dealt their first loss of the season in the first game of the finals after the Colts won 24-22, and forced a second game.

It was full steam ahead for both teams as everything hung in the balance in the winner-take-all final championship game, but the Blue Marlins got the better of the Colts and won, 20-16.

Throughout the game, however, neither team was far behind the other and a seesawing of the lead ensued—with the Colts in the lead in the first quarter, then the Blue Marlins in the second.

The last half saw an even more aggressive game defensively with man-to-man defenses put up against both teams' leading scorers.

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Dodgers, Pirates route foes in Masters League

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Dodgers and Pirates are still looking like the teams to beat in the 2023 Tan Holdings-SBL Masters League as they routed their foes last Thursday and Friday at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Baseball Field.

Robert Bansil led the Dodgers to a defining 14-2 victory over the Blue Jays last Friday as he hit the first home run of the season. Bansil scorched the ball past the outfield fence and brought in Rich Quitugua for a two-run homer in the first inning to put their team up, 3-0.

LEIGH GASES

Dodgers' Mark Villagomez raises his arms in celebration as he crosses home plate safely after a triple hit by Jeff Cruz in the first inning of their game against Blue Jays in the 2023 Tan Holdings-SBL Masters League at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios.

The inning wasn't over yet as the Dodgers' offense was just getting started. After Bansil, John Acosta, Mark Villagomez, and Eddie Manibusan all reached base, then a triple by pitcher Jeff Cruz swept the bases clear. Clint Quitugua and James Benavente added two runs and made it a 9-0 game before the inning mercifully ended for the Blue Jays.

The Blue Jays tried to maneuver past Cruz, but he was in cruise control throughout the game and gave up just three hits. The two runs came in the last inning when Mike Tomokane and Manny Cabrera scored.

It was not even a dent against the Dodgers as at this point, they had scored five more runs and the game ended early when the Blue Jays could not add any more runs. The Dodgers are second behind the Pirates at a 4-2 record.

In last Thursday's game, the undefeated Pirates stole their sixth win after they defeated the Marlins, 15-5.

The Marlins kept close as they scored their five runs by the third inning, but the Pirates

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FMS outruns COVMS, 17-2

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Francisco M. Sablan Middle School Napu Riders evened up their record, 2-2, after they outscored Cha Cha Ocean View Middle School Lancherus, 17-2, in the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 last Saturday at the Dandan Softball Field.

In a run-mercy ruled game, FMS' Joseph Lizama quickly became the star of the show after he stepped up to the plate and whacked an inside the park home run in the first inning.

With his homer, he brought in Eric Palacios, Gavin Rogolofoi, and Logan Daniel, who all reached base via walks and it became a 4-1 game.

The Lancherus tried to reap more runs but were stopped dead in their tracks by Napu Riders pitcher Kelvin John. Only one more run came in for COVMS by way of Jacob Santos in the second inning, and John went on to

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LEIGH GASES

Francisco M. Sablan Middle School's Joseph Lizama hits an inside-the-park grand slam in the first inning against Cha Cha Ocean View Middle School during the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 last Saturday at the Dandan Softball Field.